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MY REMINISCENCES OF THE ANGLO-BOER WAR

BY

GENERAL BEN J. VILJOEN

(LATE ASSISTANT COMMANDANT-GENERAL OF THE TRANSVAAL BURGHER FORCES AND MEMBER FOR JOHANNESBURG IN THE TRANSVAAL VOLKSRAAD)

POPULAR EDITION

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BEN J. VILJOEN

To M. T. STEYN,

Late President of the Orange Free State Republic,
The "Hero of the Boer War"
This Work is Respectfully Dedicated.

THE AUTHOR TO THE READER.

In offering my readers my reminiscences of the late War, I feel that it is necessary to ask their indulgence and to plead extenuating circumstances for many obvious shortcomings.

It should be pointed out that the preparation of this work was attended with many difficulties and disabilities, of which the following were only a few:—

(1) This is my first attempt at writing a book, and as a simple Afrikander I lay no claim to any literary ability.

(2) When captured by the British forces I was deprived of all my notes, and have been compelled to consult and depend largely upon my memory for my facts and data. I would wish to add, however, that the notes and minutiæ they took from me referred only to events and incidents covering six months of the War. Twice before my capture, various diaries I had compiled fell into British hands; and on a third occasion, when our camp at Dalmanutha was burned out by a "grassfire," other notes were destroyed.

(3) I wrote this book while a prisoner-of-war, fettered, as it were, by the strong chains with which a British "parole" is circumscribed. I was, so to say, bound hand and foot, and always made to feel sensibly the humiliating position to which we, as prisoners-of-war

on this island, were reduced. Our unhappy lot was rendered unnecessarily unpleasant by the insulting treatment offered us by Colonel Price, who appeared to me an excellent prototype of Napoleon's custodian, Sir Hudson Lowe. One has only to read Lord Rosebery's work, "The Last Phase of Napoleon," to realise the insults and indignities Sir Hudson Lowe heaped upon a gallant enemy.

We Boers experienced similar treatment from our custodian, Colonel Price, who appeared to be possessed with the very demon of distrust and who conjured up about us the same fantastic and mythical plans of escape as Sir Hudson Lowe attributed to Napoleon. It is to his absurd suspicions about our safe custody that I trace the bitterly offensive regulations enforced on us.

While engaged upon this work, Colonel Price could have pounced down upon me at any moment, and, having discovered the manuscript, would certainly have promptly pronounced the writing of it in conflict with the terms of my "parole."

I have striven as far as possible to refrain from criticism, except when compelled to do so, and to give a coherent story, so that the reader may easily follow the episodes I have sketched. I have also endeavoured to be impartial, or, at least, so impartial as an erring human being can be who has just quitted the bloody battlefields of a bitter struggle.

But the sword is still wet, and the wound is not yet healed.

I would assure my readers that it has not been without hesitation that I launch this work upon the world. There have been many amateur and professional writers who have preceded me in overloading the reading public with what purport to be "true histories" of the War. But having been approached by friends to add my little effort

to the ponderous tomes of War literature, I have written down that which I saw with my own eyes, and that which I personally experienced. If seeing is believing, the reader may lend credence to my recital of every incident I have herein recounted.

During the last stages of the struggle, when we were isolated from the outside world, we read in newspapers and other printed matter captured from the British so many romantic and fabulous stories about ourselves, that we were sometimes in doubt whether people in Europe and elsewhere would really believe that we were ordinary human beings and not legendary monsters. On these occasions I read circumstantial reports of my death, and once, a long, and by no means flattering, obituary (extending over several columns of a newspaper) in which I was compared to Garibaldi, "Jack the Ripper," and Aguinaldo. On another occasion I learned from British newspapers of my capture, conviction, and execution in the Cape Colony for wearing the insignia of the Red Cross. I read that I had been brought before a military court at De Aar and sentenced to be shot, and what was worse, the sentence was duly confirmed and carried out. A very lurid picture was drawn of the execution. Bound to a chair, and placed near my open grave, I had met my doom with "rare stoicism and fortitude." "At last," concluded my amiable biographer, "this scoundrel, robber, and guerilla leader, Viljoen, has been safely removed, and will trouble the British Army no longer." I also learned with mingled feelings of amazement and pride that, being imprisoned at Mafeking at the commencement of hostilities, General Baden-Powell had kindly exchanged me for Lady Sarah Wilson.

To be honest, none of the above-mentioned reports were strictly accurate. I can assure the reader that I was never killed in action or executed at De Aar, I

was never in Mafeking or any other prison in my life (save here at St. Helena), nor was I in the Cape Colony during the War. I never masqueraded with a Red Cross, and I was never exchanged for Lady Sarah Wilson. Her ladyship's friends would have found me a very poor exchange.

It is also quite inaccurate and unfair to describe me as a "thief" and "a scoundrel" It was, indeed, not an heroic thing to do, seeing that the chivalrous gentlemen of the South African Press who employed the epithets were safely beyond my view and reach, and I had no chance of correcting their quite erroneous impressions. I could neither refute nor defend myself against their infamous libels, and for the rest, my friend "Mr. Atkins" kept us all exceedingly busy.

That which is left of Ben Viljoen after the several "coups de grace" in the field and the tragic execution at De Aar, stil "pans" out at a fairly robust young person—quite an ordinary young fellow, indeed, thirty-four years of age, of middle height and build. Somewhere in the the Marais Quartier of Paris—where the French Huguenots came from—there was an ancestral Viljoen from whom I am descended. In the War just concluded I played no great part of my own seeking. I met many compatriots who were better soldiers than myself; but on occasions I was happily of some small service to my Cause and to my people.

The chapters I append are, like myself, simple in form. If I have become notorious it is not my fault; it is the fault of the newspaper paragraphist, and in these pages I have endeavoured, as far as possible, te leave the stage to more prominent actors, merely offering myself as guide to the many battle-fields on which we have waged our unhappy struggle.

I shall not disappoint the reader by promising him sensational or thrilling episodes. He will find none such in these pages; he will find only a naked and unembellished story.

BEN J. VILJOEN.

(*Assistant Commandant General of the Republican Forces.*)

St. Helena,
June, 1902.

SOME PRESS OPINIONS.

General Ben Viljoen's Book on the War.

("My Reminiscences of the Anglo-Boer War".)

The following are a few of the Hundreds of Press Opinions received:

The Times:—"General Ben Viljoen's book is in many ways the best book on the Boer side that has yet appeared. It is written by a man who possesses considerable idea of style, abundant and irrepressible good humour, a sense of fairness towards his opponents, and a very good military judgment."

St. James's Gazette:—"General Ben Viljoen's book is the only one emanating from the Boer side which we have seen, which can be read by an Englishman without his gorge rising at the palpable misstatement and unfair accusation. Ben Viljoen is as fair as he is vivid and amusing."

Daily Express:—"General Viljoen's is one of the most readable and best worth reading of the War books."

South Africa:—"It has none of the defects of ——— ——— 's bombast. General Viljoen refrains from the sneering tone which disfigures ——— ——— 's book."

Nottingham Guardian:—"General Viljoen is so thoroughly outspoken and straightforward that his book kindles a very friendly feeling and leaves a far pleasanter impression than the much heralded production of ——— ———."

Dundee Courier:—"The book will be welcomed as a standard history."

Weekly Times:—"Of the three books issued giving the Boer side of the War, General Viljoen's is certainly the most readable."

Liverpool Courier:—"General Ben Viljoen furnished the best and most impartial story of the Burgher authors."

The Globe:—"The whole narrative is full of interest, and will appeal to the general reader more than any book yet published on the War."

The Literary World:—"Of the Books on the War from the Boer side there is not one which pleases us more than General Viljoen's."

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MY REMINISCENCES

OF THE

ANGLO-BOER WAR

CHAPTER I.

THE WAR CLOUDS GATHER.

IN 1895 the political clouds gathered thickly and grew threatening. They were unmistakable in their portent. War was meant, and we heard the martial thunder rumbling over our heads.

The storm broke in the shape of an invasion from Rhodesia on our Western frontiers, a raid planned by soldiers of a friendly power.

However one may endeavour to argue the chief cause of the South African war to other issues, it remains an irrebuttable fact that the Jameson Raid was primarily responsible for the hostilities which eventually took place between Great Britain and the Boer Republics.

Mr. Rhodes, the sponsor and *deux ex machinâ* of the Raid, could not agree with Mr. Paul Kruger, and had failed in his efforts to establish friendly relations with him. Mr. Kruger, quite as stubborn and ambitious as Mr. Rhodes, placed no faith in the latter's amiable proposals, and the result was that fierce hatred was engendered between the two Gideons, a racial rancour spreading to fanatical lengths.

Dr. Jameson's stupid raid is now a matter of history; but from that fataful New Year's Day of 1896 we Boers date the terrible trials and sufferings to which our poor country has been exposed. To that mischievous incident, indeed, we directly trace the struggle now terminated.

This invasion, which was synchronous with an armed rebellion at Johannesburg, was followed by the arrest and imprisonment of the so-called gold magnates of the Witwatersrand. Whether these exceedingly wealthy but extremely degenerate sons of Albion and Germania deserved the death sentence pronounced upon their leaders at Pretoria for high treason it is not for me to judge.

I do recall, however, the appeal for mercy that went up, how piteously the Transvaal Government was petitioned and supplicated, and finally moved "to forgive and forget." The same faction now pressing so obdurately for "no mercy" upon the Colonial Afrikanders who joined us, then supplicated all the Boer gods for forgiveness.

Meantime the Republic was plagued by the rinderpest scourge, which wrought untold havoc throughout the country. This scourge was preceded by the dynamite disaster at Vrededorp (near Johannesburg) and the railway disaster at Glencoe in Natal. It was succeeded by a smallpox epidemic, which, in spite of medical efforts, grew from sporadic to epidemic and visited all classes of the Rand, exacting victims wherever it travelled. During the same period difficulties occurred in Swaziland necessitating the despatch of a strong commando to the disaffected district and the maintenance of a garrison at Bremersdorp. The following year hostilities were commenced against the Magato tribe in the north of the Republic.

After an expensive expedition, lasting six months, the rebellion was quelled. There was little doubt that the administration of unfaithful native commissioners was in part responsible for the difficulties, but there is less doubt

that external influences also contributed to the rebellion. This is not the time, however, to tear open old wounds.

Mr. Rhodes has disappeared from the stage for ever; he died as he had lived. His relentless enemy Mr. Kruger, who was pulling the strings at the other end, is still alive. Perhaps the old man may be spared to see the end of the bloody drama; it was undoubtedly he and Mr. Rhodes who played the leading parts in the prologue.

Which of these two "Big Men" took the greatest share in bringing about the Disaster which has drenched South Africa with blood, and draped it in mourning, it would be improper for me at this period to suggest. Mr. Rhodes has been summoned before a Higher Tribunal; Mr. Kruger has still to come up for judgment before the people whose fate and very existence as a nation, are, at the time of writing, wavering in the balance.

We have been at one another's throats, and for this we have to thank our statesmen. It is to be hoped that our leaders of the future will attach more value to human lives, and that Boer and Briton will be enabled to live amicably side by side.

A calm and statesmanlike government, by men free from ambition and racial rancour, by men of unblemished reputation, will be the only means of pacifying South Africa and keeping South Africa at peace.

CHAPTER II.

AND THE WAR STORM BREAKS.

IT was during a desultory discussion of an ordinary sessions of the Second Volksraad, in which I represented Johannesburg, that one day in September, 1899—to be precise, the afternoon of the 28th—the messenger of the House came to me with a note, and whispered, "A message from General Joubert Sir: it is urgent, and the General says it requires your immediate attention."

I broke the seal of the envelope with some trepidation. I guessed its contents, and a few of my colleagues in the Chamber hung over me almost speechless with excitement, whispering curiously, "Jong, is dit fout?"—"Is this correct. Is it war?"

Everybody knew of course, that we were in for a supreme crisis, that the relations between Great Britain and our Republic were strained to the bursting point, that bitter diplomatic notes had been exchanged between the governments of the two countries for months past, and that a collision, an armed collision, was sooner or later inevitable.

Being "Fighting-Commandant" of the Witwatersrand goldfields, and therefore, an officer of the Transvaal army, my movements on that day excited great interest among my colleagues in the Chamber. After reading General Joubert's note, I said as calmly as possible: "Yes, the die is cast; I am leaving for the Natal frontier. Good-bye. I must now quit the house. Who knows, perhaps for ever!"

General Joubert's mandate was couched as follows:—

"You are hereby ordered to proceed with the Johannesburg commando to Volksrust to-morrow, Friday evening, at 8 o'clock. Your field cornets have already received instructions to commandeer the required number of burghers and the necessary horses, waggons, and equipment. Instructions have also been given for the necessary railway conveyances to be held ready. Further instructions will reach you."

Previous to my departure next morning, I made a hurried call at Commandant-General Joubert's offices. The ante-chamber leading to the Generalissimo's "sanctum-sanctorum" was crowded with brilliantly-uniformed officers of our State Artillery, and it was only by dint of using my elbows very vigorously that I gained admission to my chief-in-command.

The old General seemed to feel keenly the gravity of the situation. He looked careworn and troubled: "Good-morning, Commandant," he said; "aren't you away yet?"

I explained that I was on my way to the railway station, but I thought before leaving I'd like to see him about one or two things.

"Well, go on, what is it?" General Joubert, enquired, petulanty.

"I want to know, General Joubert," I said, "whether England has declared war against us, or whether we are taking the lead. And another thing, what sort of general have I to report myself to at Volksrust?"

The old warrior, without looking up or immediately answering me, drew various cryptic and hieroglyphic pothooks and figures on the paper before him. Then he suddenly lifted his eyes and pierced me with a look, at which I quailed and trembled.

He said very slowly: "Look here; there is as yet no declaration of war, and hostilities have not yet commenced. You and my other officers should understand that, very clearly, because possibly the differences between ourselves and Great Britain may still be settled. We are only going

to occupy our frontiers because England's attitude is extremely provocative, and if England sees that we are fully prepared and that we do not fear her threats, she will perhaps be wise in time and reconsider the situation. We also want to place ourselves in a position to prevent and quell a repetition of the Jameson Raid with more force than we exerted in 1896."

An hour afterwards I was on board a train travelling to Johannesburg in the company of General Piet Cronje and his faithful wife. General Cronje told me that he was proceeding to the western districts of the Republic to take up the command of the Potchefstroom and Lichtenburg burghers. His instructions, he said, were to protect the Western frontier.

I left General Cronje at Johannesburg on the 29th September, 1899, and never saw him again until I met him at St. Helena nearly two and a half years afterwards, on the 25th March, 1902. When I last saw him we greeted each other as free men, as free and independent legislators and officers of a free Republic. We fought for our rights to live as a nation.

Now the veteran Cronje is a broken old man, captive like myself, far away from our homes and our country.

Then and Now!

Then we went abroad free, and freedomloving men, burning with patriotism. Our wives and our womenfolk watched us go; full of sorrow and anxiety, but satisfied that we were going abroad in our country's cause.

And Now!

Two promising and prosperous Republics wrecked, their fair homesteads destroyed, their people in mourning, and thousands of innocent women and children the victims of a cruel war.

There is scarcely an Afrikander family without an

unhealable wound. Everywhere the traces of the bloody struggle; and alas, most poignant and distressing fact of all, burghers who fought side by side with us in the earlier stages of the struggle are now to be found in the ranks of the enemy.

These wretched men, ignoring their solemn duty, left their companions in the lurch, without sense of shame or respect for the braves who fell fighting for their land and people.

Oh, day of judgment! The Afrikander nation will yet avenge your treachery.

CHAPTER III.

THE INVASION OF NATAL.

AFTER taking leave of my friend Cronje at Johannesburg Station, my first duty was to visit my various field cornets. About four o'clock that afternoon I found my commando was as nearly ready as could be expected. When I say ready, I mean ready on paper only, as later experience showed. My three field cornets were required to equip 900 mounted men with waggons and provisions, and of course they had *carte blanche* to commandeer. Only fully enfranchised burghers of the South African Republic were liable to be commandeered, and in Johannesburg town there was an extraordinary conglomeration of cosmopolitans amenable to this gentle process of enlistment.

It would take up too much time to adequately describe the excitement of Johannesburg on this memorable day. Thousands of Uitlanders were flying from their homes, contenting themselves, in their hurry to get away, to stand in Kaffir or coal trucks and to expose themselves cheerfully to the fierce sun, and other elements. The streets were palpitating with burghers ready to proceed to the frontier that night, and with refugees speeding to the stations. Everybody was in a state of intense feeling. One was half hearted, another cheerful, and a third thirsting for blood, while many of my men were under the influence of alcohol.

When it was known that I had arrived in the town my room in the North Western Hotel was besieged.

I was approached by all sorts of people pleading exemption from commando duty. One Boer said he knew that his solemn duty was to fight for his country and his freedom, but he would rather decline. Another declared that he could not desert his family; while yet another came forward with a stary that of his four horses, three had been commandeered, and that these horses were his only means of subsistence. A fourth complained that his waggons and mules had been clandestinely (although officially) removed. Many malingerers suddenly discovered acute symptoms of heart disease and brought easily-obtained doctor's certificates, assuring me that tragic consequences would attend their exposure in the field. Ladies came to me pleading exemption for their husbands, sisters for brothers, mothers for sons, all offering plausible reasons why their loved ones should be exempted from commando duty. It was very difficult to deal with all these clamorous visitors. I was much in the position of King Solomon, though lacking his wisdom. But I would venture to say that his ancient majesty himself would have been perplexed had he been in my place. It is necessary that the reader should know, that the main part of the population was composed of all nationalities and lacked every element of Boer discipline.

On the evening of the 29th of September, I left with the Johannesburg commando in two trains. Two-thirds of my men had no personal acquaintance with me, and at the departure there was some difficulty because of this. One burgher came into my private compartment uninvited; he evidently forgot his proper place, and when I suggested to him that the compartment was private and reserved for officers, he told me to go to the devil, and I was compelled to remove him somewhat precipitately from the carriage. This same man was afterwards one of my most trustworthy scouts.

The following afternoon we reached Standerton, where I received telegraphic instructions from General Joubert to join my commando to that of Captain Schiel, who was in charge of the German Corps, and to place myself under the supreme command of Jan Kock, a member of the Executive Council, who had been appointed a general by the Government.

We soon discovered that quite one-third of the horses we had taken with us were untrained for the serious business of fighting, and also that many of the new burghers of foreign nationality had not the slightest idea how to ride. Our first parade, or "Wapenschouwing" gave food for much hilarity. Here one saw horses waltzing and jumping, while over there a rider was biting the sand, and towards evening the doctors had several patients. It may be stated that although not perfectly equipped in the matter of ambulances, we had three physicians with us, Doctors Visser, Marais, and Shaw. Our spiritual welfare was being looked after by the Reverends Nel and Martins, but not for long, as both these gentlemen quickly found that commando life was unpleasant and left us spiritually to ourselves, even as the European Powers left us politically. But I venture to state that no member of my commando really felt acutely the loss of the theological gentlemen who primarily accompanied us.

On the following day General Kock and a large staff arrived at the laager, and together with the German Corps, we trekked to Paardakop and Klip River, in the Orange Free State, where we were to occupy Botha's Pass. My convoy comprised about a hundred carts, mostly drawn by mules, and it was amusing to see the variety of provisions my worthy field-cornets had gathered together. There were three full waggons of lime-juice and other unnecessary articles which I caused to be unloaded at the first halting-place to make room for more serviceable provisions. It

should be mentioned that of my three field-cornets only one, the late Piet Joubert of Jeppestown, actually accompanied my commando. The others sent substitutes, perhaps because they did not like to expose themselves to the change of air. We rested some days at the Klip River, in the Orange Free State, and from thence I was sent with a small escort of burghers by our General to Harrismith to meet a number of Free State officers. After travelling two days I came upon Chief Free State Commandant Prinsloo, who afterwards deserted, and other officers. The object of my mission was to organise communications with these officers. On the 11th of October, having returned to my commando, we received a report that our Government had despatched the Ultimatum to England, and that the time specified for the reply to that document had elapsed and hostilities had begun.

We received orders to invade Natal, and crossed the frontier that very evening. I, with a patrol of 50 men, had not crossed the frontier very far when one of my scouts rode up with the report that a large British force was in sight on the other side of the River Ingogo. I said to myself at the time: "If this be true the British have rushed up fairly quickly, and the fat will be in the fire very soon."

We then broke into scattered formation and carefully proceeded into Natal. After much reconnoitring and concealment, however, we soon discovered that the "large English force" was only a herd of cattle belonging to friendly Boers, and that the camp consisted of two tents occupied by some Englishmen and Kaffirs who were mending a defective bridge. We also came across a cart drawn by four bullocks belonging to a Natal farmer, and I believe this was the first plunder we captured in Natal. The Englishman, who said he knew nothing about any war, received a pass to proceed with his servants to the

English lines, and he left with the admonition to read the newspapers in future and learn when war was imminent. Next day our entire commando was well into Natal. The continuous rain and cold of the Drakenbergen rendered our first experience of veldt life, if not unbearable, very discouraging. We numbered a fairly large commando, as Commandant J. Lombard, commanding the Hollander corps, had also joined us. Close by Newcastle we encountered a large number of commandos, and a general council of war was held under the presidency of Commandant General Joubert. It was here decided that Generals Lukas Meyer and Dijl Erasmus should take Dundee, which an English garrison held, while our commandos under General Kock were instructed to occupy the Biggarburg Pass. Preceded by scouts we wound our way in that direction, leaving all our unnecessary baggage in the shape of provisions and ammunition waggons at Newcastle.

One of my acting field-cornets and the field-cornets of the German commando, prompted by goodness knows what, pressed forward south, actually reaching the railway station at Elandslaagte. A goods train was just steaming into the station, and it was captured by these foolhardy young Moltkes. I was much dissatisfied with this action, and sent a messenger ordering them to retire after having destroyed the railway. On the same night I received instructions from General Kock to proceed with two hundred men and a cannon to Elandslaagte, and I also learned that Captain Schiel and his German Corps had left in the same direction.

Imagine, we had gone further than had actually been decided at the council of war, and we pressed forward still further without any attempt being made to keep in touch with the other commandos on our left and right. Seeing the inexpediency of this move, I went to the General in command and expressed my objections to it. But General Kock was firmly decided on the point, and said, "Go

along my boy." We reached Elandslaagte at midnight, it was raining very heavily. After scrambling for positions in the darkness, although I had already sufficiently seen that the lie of the land suggested no strategic operations, we retired to rest. Two days later occurred the fateful battle.

CHAPTER IV.

DEFEATED AT ELANDSLAAGTE.

IN the grey dawn of the 21st of October a number of scouts I had despatched overnight in the direction of Ladysmith returned with the tidings that "the khakis were coming." "Where are they, and how many are there of them?" I asked. "Commandant," the chief scout replied, "I don't know much about these things, but I should think that the English number quite a thousand mounted men, and they have guns, and they have already passed Modderspruit." To us amateur soldiers this report was by no means reassuring, and I confess I hoped fervently that the English might stay away for some little time longer.

It was at sunrise that the first shot I heard in this war was fired. Presently the men we dreaded wer visible on the ridges of hills south of the little red railway station at Elandslaagte. Some of my men hailed the coming fight with delight; others, more experienced in the art of war, turned deadly pale. That is how the Boers felt in their first battle. The awkward way in which many of my men sought cover, demonstrated at once how inexperienced in warfare we youngsters were. We started with our guns and tried a little experimental shooting. The second and third shots appeared to be effective; at any rate, as far as we could judge, they seemed to disturb the equanimity of the advancing troops. I saw an ammunition cart deprived of its team and generally smashed.

The British guns appeared to be of very small calibre

indeed. Certainly they failed to reach us, and all the harm they did was to send a shell through a Boer ambulance within the range of fire. This shot was, I afterwards ascertained, purely accidental. When the British found that we too, strange to say, had guns, and what is more, knew how to use them, they retired towards Ladysmith. But this was merely a ruse; they had gone back to fetch more. Still, though it was a ruse, we were cleverly deceived by it, and while we were off-saddling and preparing the mid-day meal they were arranging a new and more formidable attack. From the Modderspruit siding they were pouring troops brought down by rail, and although we had a splendid chance of shelling the newcomers from the high kopje we occupied, General Kock, who was in supreme command of our corps, for some reason which has never been explained, refused to permit us to fire upon them. I went to General Kock and pleaded with him, but he was adamant. This was a bitter disappointment to me, but I consoled myself with the thought that the General was much older than myself, and had been fighting since he was a baby; I therefore presumed he knew better. Possibly if we younger commanders had had more authority in the earlier stages of the war, and had had less to deal with arrogant and stupid old men, we should have reached Durban and Cape Town.

I must here again confess that none of my men displayed any of the martial determination with which they had so buoyantly proceeded from Johannesburg. To put it bluntly, some of them were "footing" it, and the English cavalry, taking advantage of this, were rapidly outflanking them. The British tactics were plain enough. General French had placed his infantry in the centre with three field batteries (fifteen pounders), while his cavalry, with Maxims, encompassed our right and left. He was forming a crescent, with the obvious purpose of turning

our position with his right and left wing. When charging at the close of the attack, the cavalry, which consisted mainly of lancers, were on both our flanks, and completely prevented our retreat. It was not easy to estimate the number of our assailant's forces. Judging roughly, I calculated they numbered between, 5,000 and 6,000, while we were 800 all told, and our artillery consisted merely of two Nordenfeldt guns with shell, and no grape shot.

The British certainly meant business that day. It was the baptismal fire of the Imperial Light Horse, a corps principally composed of Johannesburgers, who were politically and racially our bitter enemies. And what was more unfortunate, our guns were so much exposed that they were soon silenced. For a long time we did our best to keep our opponents at bay, but they came in crushing numbers, and speedily dead and maimed burghers covered the veldt. Then the Gordon Highlanders and the other infantry detachments commenced to storm our positions. We got them well within the range of our rifle fire, and made our presence folt; but they kept pushing on with splendid determination and indomitable pluck, though their ranks were being decimated before our very eyes.

This was the first, as it was the last time in the War that I heard a British band playing to cheer attacking "Tommies." I believe it used to be a British war custom to rouse martial instincts with lively music, but something must have gone wrong with the works in this War, there must have occurred a rift in the lute, for ever after this first battle of Elandslaagte, the British abandoned flags, banners, and other quite unnecessary furniture.

About half an hour before sunset, the enemy had come up close to our positions and on all sides a terrible battle raged. To keep them back was now completely out of the question. They had forced their way between a kloof, and while rushing up with my men towards them,

my rifle was smashed by a bullet. A wounded burgher handed me his and I joined Field-Cornet Peter Joubert who, with seven other burghers, was defending the kloof. We poured a heavy fire into the British, but they were not to be shaken off. Again and again they rushed up in irresistible strength, gallantly encouraged by their brave officers. Poor Field-Cornet Joubert perished at this point.

When the sun had set and the awful scene was enveloped in darkness which hid a dreadful spectacle of maimed Germans, Hollanders, Frenchmen, Irishmen, Americans, and Boers lying on the veldt the groans of the wounded were heartrending; for some the sun had set for ever.

CHAPTER V.

PURSUED BY THE LANCERS.

ANOTHER charge, and the British, encouraged by their success, had taken our last position, guns and all. My only resource now was to flee, and the battle of Elandslaagte was a thing of the past.

Another last look at the bloody scene. It was very hard to have to beat an ignominious retreat, but it was harder still to go without being able to assist one's wounded comrades, who were piteously crying aloud for help. To have to leave them in the hands of the enemy was exceedingly distressing to me; but there was no other course open, and fleeing, I hoped I might "live to fight another day." I got away accompanied by Fourie and my Kaffir servant. "Let us go," I said, "perhaps we may be lucky to fall in with some more burghers round here and have another shot at them." Behind us the British lancers were shouting "Stop, stop, halt you ——— Boers!" They fired briskly at us, but our little ponies responded gamely to the spur, and aided by the darkness, we rode on safely. Still the lancers did not abandon the chase, and followed us for a long distance. From time to time we could hear the pitiful cries and entreaties of burghers who were being "finished off," but we could see nothing. My man and I had fleet horses in good condition, those of the pursuing lancers were big and clumsy.

My adjutant, Piet Fourie, however, was not so fortunate as myself. He was overtaken and made a prisoner. Revolvers were being promiscuously fired at us, and at

times the distance between us and our pursuers grew smaller. We could plainly hear them shouting "Stop, or I'll shoot you," or "Halt, you damned Boer, or I'll run my lance through your blessed body."

We really had no time to take much notice of these pretty compliments. It was a race for life and freedom. Looking round furtively once more I could distinguish my pursuers; I could see their long assegais; I could hear the snorting of their unwieldy horses, the clattering of their swords. These unpleasant combinations were enough to strike terror into the heart of any ordinary man.

Everything now depended upon the fleetness and staying power of my sturdy little Boer pony, Blesman. He remained my faithful friend long after he had got me out of this scrape; he was shot, poor little chap, the day when they made me a prisoner. Poor Blesman, to you I owe my life! Blesman was plainly in league against all that was British; from the first he displayed Anglophobia of a most acute character. He has served me in good stead, and now lies buried, faithful little heart, in a Lydenburg ditch.

In my retreat Sunday River had to be crossed. It was deep, but deep or not, we had to get through it. We were going at such a pace that we nearly tumbled down the banks. The precipice must have been very steep; all I remember is finding myself in the water with Blesman by my side. The poor chap had got stuck with his four legs in the drift sand. I managed to liberate him, and after a lot of scrambling and struggling and wading we got to the other side. On the opposite bank the British were still firing. I therefore decided to lie low in the water, hoping to delude them into thinking I was killed or drowned. My stratagem was successful. I heard one of my pursuers say, "We've finished him," and with a few more pyrotechnic farewells they retraced their steps towards Ladysmith.

More horsemen however, came in pursuit. Unquestionably the British, fired by their splendid success, were following up their victory with great vigour,and again I was compelled to hide in the long grass into which my native servant, with Ethiopian instinct, had already crept. Seeing no signs of life our pursuers turned and rode away.

When all was said and done I had escaped with a good wetting. Now for Newcastle. I had still my rifle, revolver, and cartridges left to me; my field-glass was lost, probably in the river. Water there was plenty, but food I had none. The track to Newcastle, to a stranger, such as I was in that part of the country, was difficult to discover. To add to my perplexities I did not know what had happened at Dundee, where I had been told a strong British garrison was in occupation. Therefore, in straying in that direction I ran the risk of being captured.

Finally, however, I came upon a kaffir kraal. I was curtly hailed in the kaffir language, and upon asking my swarthy friends to show me the road, half a dozen natives, armed with assegais, appeared on the scene. I clasped my revolver, as their attitude seemed suspicious. Having inspected me closely, one of the elders of the community said: "You is one of dem Boers vat runs avay? We look on and you got dum dum to-day. Now we hold you, we take you English magistrate near Ladysmith." But I know my kaffir, and I sized up this black Englishman instantly. "The fact is," I said, "I'm trekking with a commando of 500 men, and we are doing a bit of scouting round your kraal. If you will show me the way to the Biggersbergen I will give you 5s. on account." My amiable and dusky friend insisted on 7s. 6d., but after I had intimated that if he did not accept 5s. I should certainly burn his entire outfit, slaughter all his women and kill all his cattle, he acquiesced. A young Zulu was deputed as my guide, but I had to use my fists and make pretty play

with my revolver, and generally hint at a sudden death, or he would have left me in the lurch. He muttered to himself for some time, and suddenly terminated his soliloquy by turning on his heels and disappearing in the darkness.

The light of a lantern presently showed a railway station, which I rightly guessed to be Wasch-bank. Here two Englishmen, probably railway officials, came up to me, accompanied by my treacherous guide. The latter had obviously been good enough to warn the officials at the station of my approach, but luckily they were unarmed. One of them said, "You've lost your way, it appears," to which I replied, "Oh, no, indeed; I'm on the right track I think." "But," he persisted, "you won't find any of your people here now; you've been cut to pieces at Elandslaagte and Lukas Meyer's and Erasmus's forces round Dundee have been crushed. You had better, come along with me to Ladysmith. I promise you decent treatment." I took care not to get in between them, and, remaining at a little distance, said, revolver in hand. "Thanks very much, it's awfully good of you; I have no business to transact in Ladysmith for the moment and will now continue my journey. Good-night." "No, no, no, wait a minute," returned the man who had spoken first, "you know you can't pass here." "We shall see about that," I said. They rushed upon me, but ere they could overpower me I had levelled my revolver. The first speaker tried to disarm me, but I shook him off and shot him. He fell, but as far as I know, or could see, was not fatally wounded. The other man, thinking discretion the better part of valour, disappeared in the darkness, and my unfaithful guide having edged away as soon as he saw the glint of my gun, was nowhere to be seen.

My adventures on that terrible night were, however, not to end with this mild diversion. About an hour after daybreak, I came upon a Barn upon which the legend "Post Office Savings Bank" was inscribed. A big Newfound-

land dog lay on the threshold, and although he wagged his tail in a not unfriendly manner, he did not seem disposed to take any special notice of me. There was a passage between the barn and some stables at the back and I went down to prospect the latter. What luck if there had been a horse for me there! Of course I should only have wanted to borrow it, but there was a big iron padlock on the door, though inside the stables I heard the movements of an animal. A horse, meant to me, just then, considerably more than three kingdoms to King Richard. For the first time in my life I did some delicate burglary and housebreaking to boot. But the English declare that all is fair in love and war, and they ought to know.

I discovered an iron bar, which enabled me to wrench off the lock from the stable door, and, having got so far with my burglarious performance, I entered cautiously, and I may say nervously. Creeping up to the manger I fumbled about till I caught hold of a strap to which the animal was tied, cut the strap through and led the horse away. I was wondering why it went so slowly and that I had almost to drag the poor creature along. Once outside I found to my utter disgust that my spoil was a venerable and decrepit donkey. Disappointed and disheartened, I abandoned my booty, leaving that ancient mule brooding meditatively outside the stable door and clearly wondering why he had been selected for a midnight excursion. But there was no time to explain or apologise, and as the mule clearly could not carry me as fast as my own legs, I left him to his meditations.

At dawn, when the first rays of the sun lit up the Biggersbergen in all their grotesque beauty, I realised for the first time where I was, and found that I was considerably more than 12 miles from Elandslaagte, the fateful scene of yesterday. Tired out, half-starved and as disconsolate as the donkey at the stable, I sat myself on an anthill.

For 24 hours I had been foodless, and was now quite exhausted. I fell into a reverie; all the past day's adventures passed graphically before my eyes as in a kaleidoscope; all the horrors and carnage of the battle, the misery of my maimed comrades, who only yesterday had answered the battle cry full of vigour and youth, the pathos of the dead who, cut down in the prime of their life and buoyant health, lay yonder on the veldt, far away from wives and daughters, and friends, for ever more.

While in a brown study on this anthill, 30 men on horseback suddenly dashed up towards me from the direction of Elandslaagte. I threw myself flat on my face, seeking the anthill as cover, prepared to sell my life dearly should they prove to be Englishmen. As soon as they observed me they halted, and sent one of their number up to me. Evidently they knew not whether I was friend or foe, for they reconnoitred my prostrate form behind the anthill with great circumspection and caution; but I speedily recognised comrades-in-arms. I think the long tail which is peculiar to the Basuto pony enabled me to identify them as such, and one friend, who was their outpost, brought me a reserve horse, and what was even better, had extracted from his saddle-bag a tin of welcome bully beef to stay my gnawing hunger. But they brought sad tidings, these good friends. Slain on the battle-field lay Assistant-Commandant J. C. Bodenstein and Major Hall, of the Johannesburg Town Council, two of my bravest officers, whose loss I still regret.

We rode on slowly, and all along the road we fell in with groups of burghers. There was no question that our ranks were demoralised and heartsick. Commandant-General Joubert had made Dannhauser Station his head-quarters and thither we wended our way. But though we approached our general with hearts weighed down with sorrow, so strange and complex a character is the Boers',

that by the time we reached him we had gathered together 120 stragglers, and had recovered our spirits and our courage. I enjoyed a most refreshing rest on an unoccupied farm and sent a messenger to Joubert asking an appointment for the following morning to hand in my report of the ill-fated battle. The messenger, however, brought back a verbal answer that the General was exceedingly angry and had sent no reply. On retiring that night I found my left leg injured in several places by splinters of shell and stone. My garments had to be soaked in water to remove them, but after I had carefully cleaned my wounds they very soon healed.

The next morning I waited on the Commandant-General. He received me very coldly, and before I could venture a word said reproachfully: "Why didn't you obey orders and stop this side of the Biggarsbergen, as the Council of War decided you should do?" He followed up the reproach with a series of questions: "Where's your general?" How many men have you lost? "How many English have you killed?" I said deferentially: "Well, General, you know I am not to be bullied like this. You know you placed me in a subordinate position under the command of General Kock, and now you lay all the blame for yesterday's disaster on my shoulders. I am sorry to say General Kock is wounded and in British hands. I don't know how many men we have lost; I suppose about 30 or 40 killed and approximately 100 wounded. The British must have lost considerably more, but I am not making any estimate."

The grey-bearded generalissimo cooled a little and spoke more kindly, although he gave me to understand he did not think much of the Johannesburg commando. I replied that they had been fighting very pluckily, and that by retiring they hoped to retrieve their fortunes some other day. "H'm," returned the General, "some of your burghers have made so masterly a retreat that they have already

got to Newcastle, and I have just wired Field-Cornet Pienaar, who is in charge, that I should suggest to him to wait a little there, as I propose sending him some railway carriages to enable him to retreat still further. As for those Germans and Hollanders with you, they may go to Johannesburg; I won't have them here any more."

"General," I protested, "this is not quite fair. These people have volunteered to fight for, and with us; we cannot blame them in this matter. It is most unfortunate that Elandslaagte should have been lost, but as far as I can see there was no help for it." The old General appeared lost in thought; he seemed to take but little notice of what I said. Finally he looked up and fixed his small glittering eyes upon me as if he wished to read my most inmost thoughts.

"Yes," he said, "I know all about that. At Dundee things have gone just as badly. Lukas Meyer made a feeble attack, and Erasmus left him in the lurch. The two were to charge simultaneously, but Erasmus failed him at a critical moment, which means a loss of 130 men killed and wounded, and Lukas Meyer in retreat across the Buffalo River. And now Elandslaagte on the top of all! All this owing to the disobedience and negligence of my chief officers."

The old man spoke in this strain for some time, until I grew tired and left. But just as I was on the point of proceeding from his tent, he said: "Look here, Commandant, re-organise your commando as quickly as you can, and report to me as soon as you are ready." He also gave me permission to incorporate in the reorganised commando various Hollander and German stragglers who were loafing about, although he seemed to entertain an irradicable prejudice against the Dutch and German corps.

The Commandant of the Hollander corps, Volksraad Member Lombard, came out of the battle unscathed; his captain, Mr. B. J. Verselewel de Witt Hamer, had been

made a prisoner; the Commandant of the German corps, Captain A. Schiel, fell wounded into British hands, while among the officers who were killed in action I should mention Dr. H. J. Coster, the bravest Hollander the Transvaal ever saw, the most brilliant member of the Pretoria Bar, who laid down his life because in a stupid moment Kruger had taunted him and his compatriots with cowardice.

CHAPTER VI.

RISKING JOUBERT'S ANGER.

AFTER the above unpleasant but fairly successful interview with our Commander-in-Chief, I left the men I had gathered round me in charge of a field-cornet, and proceeded by train to Newcastle to collect the scattered remnants of my burghers, and to obtain mules and waggons for my convoy, for, as I have previously stated, it was at Newcastle we had left all our commissariat-waggons and draught cattle under a strong escort. On arrival I summoned the burghers together, and addressing them in a few words, pointed out that we should, so soon as possible, resume the march, in order to reach the fighting line without delay, and there retrieve the pride and honour of our commando.

"Our beloved country," I said, "as well as our dead, wounded, and missing comrades, require us not to lose courage at this first reverse, but to continue the righteous struggle even against overwhelming odds," and so on, in this strain.

I honestly connot understand why we should have been charged with cowardice at the battle of Elandslaagte, although many of us seemed to apprehend that this would be the case. We had made a good fight of it, but overwhelmed by an organised force of disciplined men, eight or ten times our number, we had been vanquished, and the British were the first to admit that we had manfully and honourably defended our positions. To put a wrong construction on our defeat was a libel on all who had

bravely fought the fight, and I resented it. There are such things as the fortunes of war, and as only one side can win, it cannot always be the same. However, I soon discovered that a small number of our burghers did not seem inclined to join in the prolongation of the struggle. To have forced them to rejoin us would have served no purpose, so I thought the best policy would be to send them home on furlough until they had recovered their spirits and their courage. No doubt the scorn and derision to which they would be subjected by their wives and sisters would soon induce them to take up arms again and to fulfil the duties their country required. I therefore requested those who had neither the courage nor the inclination to return to the front to fall out, and about thirty men fell back, bowing their heads in shame. They were jeered at and chaffed by their fellows, the majority of whom had elected to proceed. But the shock of Elandslaagte had been too much for the weaker brethren, who seemed deaf to every argument, and only wanted to go home. I gave each of these a pass to proceed by rail to Johannesburg, which read as follows:—

> "Permit .....
> to go to Johannesburg on account of cowardice,
> at Government's expense."

They put the permit in their pockets without suspecting its contents, and departed with their kit to the station to catch the first available train.

The reader will now have formed an idea of the disastrous moral effect of this defeat, and the subsequent difficulty of getting a commando up to its original fighting strength. But in spite of this I am proud to say that by far the greater number of the Johannesburgers were gathered round me and prepared to march to meet the enemy once more.

My trap and all its contents had been captured by the

enemy at Elandslaagte, and I found it necessary to obtain new outfits, &c., at Newcastle. This was no easy matter, as some of the storekeepers had moved the greater part of their goods to a safer place, while some commandos had appropriated most of the remainder. What was left had been commandeered by Mr. J. Moodie, a favourite of General Joubert, who was posing there as Resident Justice of the Peace; and he did not feel inclined to let any of these goods out of his possession. By alternately buying and looting, or in other words stealing, I managed to get an outfit by the next morning, and at break of day we left for Dannhauser Station, arriving there the same evening without further noteworthy incident.

Next day, when the Johannesburg corps turned out, we numbered 485 mounted men, all fully equipped. On arrival at Glencoe Station I received a telegram from General Joubert informing me that he had defeated the enemy at Nicholson's Nek near Ladysmith that day (October 30, 1899) taking 1,300 prisoners, who would arrive at Glencoe the following morning. He desired me to conduct them to Pretoria under a strong escort. What a flattering order! To conduct prisoners-of-war, taken by other burghers! Were we then fit for nothing but police duty?

However, orders have to be obeyed, so I sent one of my officers with 40 men to take the prisoners to Pretoria, and reported to the Commandant-General by telegram that his order had been executed, also asking for instructions as to where I was to proceed with my commando. The reply I received was as follows:—

"Pitch your camp near Dundee; and maintain law and order in the Province, also aid the Justice of the Peace in forwarding captured goods, ammunition, provisions, etc., to Pretoria, and see that you are not attacked a second time."

This was more than flesh and blood could bear; more

than a "white man" could stand. It was not less than a personal insult, which I deeply resented. Evidently my chief had resolved to keep us in the background; he would not trust, our commando in the fighting line. In short, he would not keep his word and give us another chance to recoup our losses.

I had, however, made up my mind, and ordered the commando to march to Ladysmith. If the General would not have me at the front I should cease to be an officer. And, although I had no friends of influence who could help me I resolved to take the bull by the horns, and leave the rest to fate.

On the 1st November, 1899, we reached the main army near Ladysmith. Having given the order to dismount I proceeded to Joubert's tent, walked in with as much boldness as I could muster, and saluted the General, who was fortunately alone. I at once opened my case, telling, him how unfair it was to keep us in the rear, and that the burghers were loudly protesting against such treatment. This plea was generally used throughout the campaign when an officer required something to be granted him. At first the old General was very wrathful. He said I had disobeyed his orders and that he had a mind to have me shot for breach of discipline. However, after much storming in his fine bass voice, he grew calmer, and in stentorian tones ordered me for the time being to join General Schalk Burger, who was operating near Lombard's Kop in the siege of Ladysmith.

That same evening I arrived there with my commando and reported myself to Lieut-General Burger. One of his adjutants, Mr. Joachim Fourie, who distinguished himself afterwards on repeated occasion and was killed in action near his house in the Carolina district, showed me a place to laager in. We pitched our tents on the same spot where a few days before Generals White and French had been defeated, and there awaited developments.

At this place the British, during the battle of Nicholson's Nek, had hidden a large quantity of rifle and gun ammunition in a hole in the ground, covering it up with grass, which gave it the appearance of a heap of rubbish. One of the burghers who feared this would be injurious to the health of our men in camp, set the grass on fire, and this soon penetrated to the ammunition. A tremendous explosion occurred, and it seemed as if there were a real battle in progress. From all sides burghers dashed up on horseback to learn where the fighting was taking place. General Joubert sent an adjutant to enquire whether the Johannesburgers were now killing each other for a change, and why I could not keep my men under better control. I asked this gentlemen to be kind enough to see for himself what was taking place, and to tell the Commandant-General that I could manage well enough to keep my men in order, but had just discovered the exact spot where the enemy had hidden their ammunition.

Meanwhile, it became daily more evident to me how greatly Joubert depreciated my commando, and that we would have to behave very well and fight very bravely to regain his favour. Other commandos also seemed to have no better opinion, and spoke of us as the laager which had to run at Elandslaagte, forgetting how even General Meyer's huge commando had been obliged to retreat in the greatest confusion at Dundee. If all the details of this Dundee engagement were published it would be discovered that it was a Boer disaster only second to that of Elandslaagte.

We were now, however, at any rate, at the front. I sent out my outposts and fixed my positions, which were very far from good; but I decided to make no complaints. We had resolved to do our very best to vindicate our honour, and to prove that our accusers had no reason to call us either cowards or good-for-nothings.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BOER GENERAL'S SUPERSTITIONS.

A FEW days after we had arrived before Ladysmith we joined an expedition to reconnoitre the British entrenchments, and my commando was ordered near some forts on the north-westerly side of the town. Both small and large artillery were being fired from each side. We approached within 800 paces of a fort; it was broad daylight and the enemy could therefore see us distinctly, knew the exact range, and received us with a perfect hailstorm of fire. Our only chance was to seek cover behind kopjes and in ditches, for on any Boer showing his head the bullets whistled round his ears. Here two of my burghers were severely wounded, and we had some considerable trouble to get them through the firing line to our ambulance. At last, late in the afternoon, came the order to retire, and we retired after having achieved nothing. I fail to see the use of this reconnoitring, but at Ladysmith everything was equally mysterious and perplexing. It was perhaps that my knowledge of military matters was too limited to understand the subtle manœuvres of those days. But I have made up my mind not to criticise our leader's military strategy, though I must say at this juncture that the whole siege of Ladysmith and the manner in which the besieged garrison was ineffectually pounded at with our big guns for several months, seem to me an unfathomable mystery, which, owing to Joubert's untimely death, will never be explained satisfactorily. But I venture to describe Joubert's policy outside Ladysmith as stupid

and primitive, and in another chapter I shall again refer to it.

About a fortnight or so afterwards, we were ordered away to guard another position to the south-west of Ladysmith, as the Free State commando under Commandant Nel, and, unless I am mistaken, under Field-Cornet Christian de Wet (afterwards the world-famous chief Commander of the Orange Free State, and of whom all Afrikanders are justly proud), had to go to cape Colony.

Here I was under the command of Dijl Erasmus, who was then General and a favourite of General Joubert. We had plenty of work given us. Trenches had to be dug and forts had to be constructed and remodelled. At this time an expedition ventured to Estcourt, under General Louis Botha, who replaced General L. Meyer, sent home on sick leave. My commando joined the expedition under Field-Cornet J. Kock, who afterwards caused me a lot of trouble.

I can say but little of this expedition to Estcourt, save that the Commander-in-Chief accompanied it. But for his being with us, I am convinced that General Botha would have pushed on at least as far as Pietermaritzburg, for the English were at that time quite unable to stop our progress. But after we got to Estcourt, practically unopposed, Joubert, though our burghers had been victorious in battle after battle, ordered us to retreat. The only explanation General Joubert ever vouchsafed about the recall of this expedition was that in a heavy thunderstorm which had been raging for two nights near Estcourt, two Boers had been struck by lightning, which, according to his doctrine, was an infallible sign from the Almighty that the commandos were to proceed no further. It seems incredible that in these enlightened days we should find such a man in command of an army; it is, nevertheless, a fact that the loss of two burghers induced our Commandant-General to recall victorious commandos who were carrying

all before them. The English at Pietermaritzburg, and even at Durban, were trembling lest we should push forward to the coast, knowing full well that in no wise could they have arrested our progress. And what an improvement in our position this would have meant! As it was, our retirement encouraged the British to push forward their fighting line so far as Chieveley Station, near the Tugela river, and the commandos had to take up a position in the "randjes," on the westerly banks of the Tugela.

CHAPTER VIII.

COLENSO AND SPION KOP FIGHTS.

EIGHT days after my commando had been stationed in my new position under General Erasmus, I received instructions to march to Potgietersdrift, on the Upper Tugela, near Spion Kop, and there to put myself at Andries Cronje's disposal. This gentleman was then a general in the Orange Free State Army, and although a very venerable looking person, was not very successful as a commander. Up to the 14th of December, 1899, no noteworthy incident took place, and nothing was done but a little desultory scouting along the Tugela, and the digging of trenches.

At last came the welcome order summoning us to action; and we were bidden to march on Colenso Heights with 200 men to fill up the ranks, as a fight was imminent. We left under General Cronje and arrived the next morning at daybreak, and a few hours after began the battle now known to the world as the Battle of Colenso (15th December, 1899).

I afterwards heard that the commandos under General Cronje were to cross the river and attack the enemy's left flank. This did not happen, as the greatest confusion prevailed owing to the various contradictory orders given by the generals. For instance, I myself received four contradictory orders form four generals within the space of ten minutes. I, however, took the initiative in moving my men up to the river to attempt the capture of a battery of guns on the enemy's left flank which had been left unprotected, as was the case with the guns which fell into

our hands later in the day. I had approached within 1,400 paces of the enemy, and my burghers were following close behind me when an adjutant from General Botha (accompanied by a gentleman named C. Fourie, who was then parading as a general) galloped up to us and ordered us at once to join the Ermelo commando, which was said to be too weak to resist the attacks of the enemy. We hurried thither as quickly as we could round the fighting line, where we were obliged to off-saddle and walk up to the position of the Ermelo burghers. This was no easy task; the battle was now in full swing, and the enemy's shells were bursting in dozens around us, and in the burning sun we had to run some miles.

When we arrived at our destination Mr. Fourie (the pseudo general) and his adjutant could nowhere be found. As to the Ermelo burghers, they said they were quite comfortable, and had asked for no assistance.

Not a single shell had reached them, for a clump of aloe trees stood a hundred yards away, which the English presumably had taken for Boers, judging by the terrific bombardment these trees were being subjected to.

By this time the attack was repulsed, and General Buller was in full retreat to Chievely, though our commando had been unable to take an active part in the fighting, at which we were greatly disappointed. It is much to be regretted that the retreat of the enemy was not followed up at once. Had this been done, the campaign in Natal would have taken an entirely different aspect, and very probably would have been attended by a more favourable conclusion. I consider myself far from a prophet, but this I know; and if we had then and on subsequent occasions followed up our successes, the result of the Campaign would have been far more satisfactory to us.

After I had assisted in bringing away through the river the guns we had taken, and seen to other matters which

required immediate attention, I was ordered to remain with the Ermelo commando at Colenso, near Toomdrift, and to await there further instructions.

A few weeks of inactivity followed, the English sending us each day a few samples of their shells from their 4.7 Naval guns. Unfortunately, our guns were of much smaller calibre, and we could send them no suitable reply. As a rule we would lie in the trenches, and a burgher would be on the look-out; so soon as he saw the flash of an English gun, he would cry out; "There's a shell," and we then sought cover, so that the enemy seldom succeeded harming us.

One day a big shell fell amongst a group of fourteen burghers who were at dinner. The shell struck a sharp rock, which it splintered into fragments, and was emitting its yellow lyddite; but, fortunately, the fuse refused to burn, and the shell did not explode, so we had a narrow escape that day from a small catastrophe.

My laager had been at Potgietersdrift all this time, and for the time being we were deprived of our tents. We were not sorry, therefore, when we were ordered to leave Colenso and to return to our camp.

A few days after we were told off to take up a position at the junction of the Little and the Big Tugela, between Spion Kop and Colenso. Here we celebrated our first Christmas in the field; our friends at Johannesburg had sent us a quantity of presents by means of a friend, Attorney Raaff, comprising cakes, cigars, cigarettes, tabacco and other luxuries. Along this part of the Tugela we found a fair quantity of vegetables, and poultry, and as their respective owners had fled we were unable to pay for what we had. We were obliged, therefore, to "borrow" all these things for the banquet befitting to the occasion.

But General Buller had not quite finished with us yet. He marched on Spion Kop, but with the exception of a

feint attack nothing of importance happened then. One day I went across the river with a patrol to discover what the enemy was doing, when we suddenly came across nine English spies, who fled as soon as they saw us. We galloped after them, trying to cut them off from the main body, which was at a little distance away from us, and would no doubt have overtaken them, but, riding at a breakneck speed over a mountain ridge, we found ourselves suddenly confronted with a strong English mounted corps, apparently engaged in drilling. We were only 500 paces away from them, and we jumped off our horses, and opened fire. But there were only a dozen of us, and the enemy soon began sending us a few shells, and prepared to attack us with their whole force. About a hundred mounted men, with horses in the best of condition, set off to pursue us.

We were obliged to ride back by the same path we had come, which was fortunate for us, as we knew the way and could ride through crevices and dongas without any hesitation. In this way we soon gave our pursuers the slip.

Buller's forces seemed at first to have the intention of forcing their way through near Potgietersdrift, and they took possession of all the "randts" on their side of the river, causing us to strengthen the position on our side. We thus had to shift our commando again to Potgietersdrift, where we soon had the enemy's Naval guns playing on our positions. This continued day and night for a whole week.

It seemed as if General Buller had determined to annihilate all the Boers with his lyddite shells, so as to enable the soldiers to walk at their leisure to the release of Ladysmith. Certainly we suffered considerably from lyddite fumes.

The British next made a feint attack near Potgietersdrift, advancing with a great clamour till they had come within

2,000 paces of us, where they occupied various "randts" and kopjes, always under cover of their artillery. Once they came a little too close to our positions, and we suddenly opened fire on them. The result was that their ambulance waggons were seen to become very busy driving backwards and forwards.

This "feint," however, was only made in order to divert our attention, while Buller was concentrating his troops and guns on Spion Kop. The ruse succeeded to a large extent, and on the 21st January the memorable battle of Spion Kop (near the Upper Tugela) began.

General Warren, who, I believe, was in command here, had ordered another "feint" attack from the extreme right wing. General Cronje and the Free Staters had taken up a position at Spion Kop, assisted by the commandos of General Erasmus and Schalk Burger.

The fight lasted the whole of that day and the next, and became more and more fierce. Luckily General Botha appeared on the scene in time, and re-arranged matters so well and with so much energy that the enemy found itself well employed, and was kept in check at all points.

I had been ordered to defend the position at Potgietersdrift, but the fighting round Spion Kop became so serious that I was obliged to send up a field cornet with his men as a reinforcement, which was soon followed by a second contingent, making altogether 200 Johannesburgers in the fight, of whom nine were killed and 18 wounded. The enemy had reached the top of the "kop" on the evening of the second day of the fight, not however, without having sustained considerable losses. At this juncture one of our generals felt so disheartened that he sent away his carts, and himself left the battlefield.

But General Botha kept his ground like a man, surrounded by the faithful little band who had already borne the brunt of this important battle. And one can

imagine our delight when next morning we found that the English had retired, leaving that immense battlefield, strewn with hundreds of dead and wounded, in our hands.

"What made them leave so suddenly last night?" was the question we asked each other then, and which remains unanswered to this day.

General Warren has stated that the cause of his departure was the want of water, but I can hardly credit that statement, as water could be obtained all the way to the top of Spion Kop; and even had it been wanting it is not likely that after a sacrifice of 1,200 to 1,300 lives the position would have been abandoned on this account alone. Our victory was undoubtedly a fluke.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BATTLE OF VAALKRANTZ.

SOON after his defeat at Spion Kop, General Buller, moved by the earnest entreaties for help from Ladysmith, and pressed by Lord Roberts, attempted a third time to break through our lines. This time my position had to bear the onslaught of his whole forces. For some days it had been clear to me what the enemy intended to do, but I wired in vain to the Commander-in-Chief to send me reinforcements, and I was left to defend a front, one and a half miles in length, with about 400 men. After many requests I at last moved General Joubert to send me one of the guns known as "Long Toms," which was placed at the rear of our position, and enabled us to command the Vaalkrantz, or as we called it, "Pontdrift" kopjes. But instead of the required reinforcements, the Commander sent a telegram to General Meyer to Colenso, telling him to come and speak to me, and to put some heart into me, for it seemed, he said, "as if I had lost faith."

General Meyer came, and I explained to him how matters stood, and that I should not be able to check the enormous attacking force with my commando alone. The British were at this time only 7,000 paces away from us. The required assistance, however, never came, although I told the General that a faith strong enough to move Majuba Hill would be of no avail without a sufficient number of men.

Early in the morning of the 5th February, 1900, my position was heavily bombarded, and before the sun had

risen four of my burghers had been put *hors de combat*. The enemy had placed their naval guns on the outskirts of the wood known as "Zwartkop" so as to be able to command our position from an elevation of about 400 feet. I happened to be on the right flank with ninety-five burghers and a pom-pom; my assistant, Commandant Jaapie du Preez, commanding the left flank.

The assailants threw two pontoon bridges across the river and troops kept pouring over from 10 o'clock in the morning. The whole of the guns were now concentrated on my position; and although we answered with a well-directed fire, the enemy charged time after time.

The number of my fighting men was rapidly dimishing. I may say this was the heaviest bombardment I witnessed during the whole of the campaign. It seemed to me as if all the guns of the British army were being fired at us.

Their big lyddite guns sent over huge shells, which mowed down all the trees on the kopje, while about fifty field pieces were incessantly barking away from a shorter range. Conan Doyle, in his book, "The Great Boer War," states that the British had concentrated no less than seventy-three guns on that kopje. In vain I implored the nearest Generals for reinforcements and requested our artillery in Heaven's name to aim at the enemy's guns. At last, however, "Long Tom" commenced operations, but the artillerymen in charge had omitted to put the powder in a safe place and it was soon struck by a lyddite shell which set the whole of it on fire. This compelled us to send to the head laager near Ladysmith for a fresh supply of powder.

On looking about me to see how my burghers were getting on I found that many around me had been killed and others were wounded. The clothes of the latter were burnt and they cried out for help in great agony.

Our pom-pom had long since been silenced by the

enemy, and thirty of my burghers had been put out of the fight. The enemy's infantry was advancing nearer and nearer and there was not much time left to think. I knelt down behind a kopje, along with some of the men, and we kept firing away at 400 paces, but although we sent a good many to eternal rest, the fire of the few burghers who were left was too weak to stem the onslaught of overwhelming numbers.

A lyddite shell suddenly burst over our very heads. Four burghers beside me were blown to pieces and my rifle was smashed. It seemed to me as if a huge cauldron of boiling fat had burst over us and for some minutes I must have lost consciousness. A mouthful of brandy and water (which I always carried with me) was given me and restored me somewhat, and when I opened my eyes I saw the enemy climbing the kopje on three sides of us, some of them only a hundred paces away.

I ordered my men to fall back and took charge of the pom-pom, and we then retired under a heavy rifle and gun fire. Some English writers have made much ado about the way in which our pom-pom was saved, but it was nothing out of the ordinary. Of the 95 burghers with me 29 had been killed, 24 wounded.

When I had a few minutes rest I felt a piercing pain in my head, and the blood began to pour from my nose and ears.

We had taken up another position at 1,700 paces, and fired our pom-pom at the enemy, who now occupied our position of a few minutes before. Our other guns were being fired as well, which gave the British an exciting quarter of an hour. On the right and left of the positions taken by them our burghers were still in possession of the "randten"; to the right Jaapie du Preez, with the loss of only four wounded, kept his ground with the rest of my commando.

Next morning the fight was renewed, and our "Long Tom" now took the lead in the cannon-concert, and seemed to make himself very unpleasant to the enemy.

The whole day was mainly a battle of big guns. My headache grew unbearable, and I was very feverish. General Botha had meanwhile arrived with reinforcements, and towards evening things took a better turn.

But I was temporarily done for, and again lost consciousness, and was taken to the ambulance. Dr. Shaw did his best for me; but I was unconscious for several days, and when I revived the doctor told me I had a slight fracture of the skull caused by the bursting of a shell. The injuries, however, could not have been very serious for ten days after I was able to leave my bed. I then heard that the night I had been taken to the hospital, the British had once more been fored to retire across the Tugela, and early in the morning of the 7th of February our burghers were again in possession of the kopje "Vaalkrantz," round which such a fierce fight had waged and for the possession of which so much blood had been spilled.

So far as I could gather from the English official reports they lost about 400 men, while our dead and wounded numbered only sixty-two.

Taking into consideration the determination with which General Buller had attacked us, and how dearly he had paid for this third abortive attempt, the retreat of his troops remains as much of a mystery to me as that at Spion Kop.

Our "Long Tom" was a decided success, and had proved itself to be exceedingly useful.

The Battle of "Vaalkrantz" kopje was to me and to the Johannesburg commando undoubtedly the most important and the fiercest fight in this war, and although one point in our positions was taken, I think that on the whole we

may be proud of our defence. About two-thirds of its defenders were killed or wounded before the enemy took that spot, and all who afterwards visited the kopje where our struggle had taken place had to admit, that unmistakable evidence showed it to be one of the hottest fights of the Natal campaign. All the trees were torn up or smashed by shells, great blocks of rock had been splintered and were stained yellow by the lyddite; mutilated bodies were lying everywhere— Briton and Boer side by side; for during the short time "Vaalkrantz" had been in their possession the English had not had an opportunity of burying the bodies of friends or foe.

I think I may quote a few paragraphs of what Dr. Doyle says in his book about this engagement:—

"The artillery-fire (the "Zwartkop" guns and other batteries) was then hurriedly aimed at the isolated "Vaalkrantz" (the real object of the attack), and had a terrific effect. It is doubtful whether ever before a position has been exposed to such an awful bombardment. The weight of the ammunition fired by some of the cannon was greater than that of an entire German battery during the Franco-Prussian war."

Prince Kraft describes the 4 and 6-pounders as mere toys compared with machine Howitzer and 4.7 guns.

Dr. Doyle, however, is not sure about the effect of these powerful guns, for he says:—

"Although the rims of the kopje were being pounded by lyddite and other bombs it is doubtful whether this terrific fire did much damage among the enemy, as seven English officers and 70 men were lying dead on the kopje against only a few Boers, who were found to have been wounded."

Of the pom-pom, which I succeeded in saving from the enemy's hands, the same writer says:—

"It was during this attack that something happened of a more picturesque and romantic nature than is usually the case in modern warfare; here it was not a question of combatants and guns being invisible or the destruction of a great mass of people. In this case it concerns a Boer gun, cut off by the British troops, which all of a sudden came out of its hiding-place and scampered away like a frightened hare from his lair. It fled from the danger as fast as the mules' legs would take it, nearly overturning, and jolting and knocking against the rocks,

while the driver bent forward as far as he could to protect himself from the shower of bullets which were whistling round his ears in all directions. British shells to the right of him, shells to the left of him bursting and spluttering, lyddite shrapnel fuming and fizzing and making the splinters fly. But over the "randtje" the gun disappeared, and in a few minutes after, it was in position again, and dealing death and destruction amongst the British assailants."

While I was under treatment in Dr. Shaw's ambulance I was honoured by a visit from General Joubert, who came to compliment me on what he called the splendid defence of Vaalkrantz, and to express his regret at the heavy loss sustained by our commando. I heard from Dr. Shaw that after the battle the groans and cries of the wounded burghers could be heard in the immediate neighbourhood of the English outposts. Some burghers volunteered to go, under cover of the darkness, to see if they could save these wounded men. They cautiously crept up to the foot of the kopjes, from where they could plainly see the English sentinels, and a little further down found in a ditch two of our wounded, named Brand and Liebenberg; the first had an arm and a leg smashed, the latter had a bullet in his thigh.

One can imagine what a terrible plight they were in after laying there for two nights and a day, exposed to the night's severe cold and the day's scorching sun. Their wounds were already decomposing, and the odour was most objectionable.

The two unfortunate men were at once carried to the laager and attended to with greatest care. Poor Liebenberg died of his wounds soon after. Brand, the youngest son of the late President Brand, of the Orange Free State, soon recovered, if I remember rightly.

At the risk of incurring the displeasure of a great number of people by adding the following statement to my description of the battle of Vaalkrantz, I feel bound to state that Commandant-General Joubert, after our successes

at Colenso, Spion Kop, and Vaalkrantz, asked the two State Presidents, Kruger and Steyn, to consider the urgency of making peace overtures to the English Government. He pointed out that the Republics had no doubt reached the summit of their glory in the War. The proposal read as follows: — That the Republican troops should at once evacuate British territory, compensation to be given for the damage to property, etc., inflicted by our commandos, against which the British Government was to guarantee that the Republics should be spared from any further incursions or attacks from British troops, and to waive its claim of Suzerainty; and that the British Government should undertake not to interfere with the internal affairs and legal procedure of the two Republics, and grant general amnesty to the colonial rebels.

Commander-in-Chief Joubert defended these proposals by pointing out that England was at that moment in difficulties, and had suffered repeated serious defeats. The opportunity should be taken, urged the General.

He was supported by several officers, but other Boer leaders contended that Natal, originally Boer territory, should never again be ceded to the enemy. As we heard nothing more of these proposals, I suppose the two State Presidents rejected them.

CHAPTER X.

THE TURN OF THE TIDE.

AFTER the English forces had retreated from Vaal-krantz across the Tugela, a patrol of my commando under my faithful adjutant, J. Du Preez, who had taken my place for the time being, succeeded in surprising a troop of fifty Lancers, of the 17th regimen, I believe, near Zwartkop, east of the Tugela, and making them prisoners after a short skirmish. Among these men, who were afterwards sent to Pretoria, was a certain Lieutenant Thurlington. It was a strange sight to see our patrol coming back with their victims, each Boer brandishing a captured lance.

Being still in the hospital in feeble health without any prospect of a speedy recovery, I took the doctor's advice and went home to Roodepoort, near Krugersdorp, where my family was staying at the time, and there, thanks to the careful treatment of my kind doctor, I soon recovered my strength.

On the 25th of February I received a communication from my commando to the effect that General Buller had once more concentrated his forces on Colenso and that heavy fighting was going on. The same evening I also had a telegram from President Kruger, urging me to rejoin my commando so soon as health would allow, for affairs seemed to have taken a critical turn. The enemy appeared to mean business this time, and our commando had already been compelled to evacuate some very important positions, one of which was Pieter's Heights.

Then the news came from Cape Colony that General Piet Cronje had been surrounded at Paardeberg, and that as he stubbornly refused to abandon his convoy and retreat, he would soon be compelled by a superior force to surrender.

The next morning I was in a fast train to Natal, accompanied by my faithful adjutant, Rokzak. My other adjutant, Du Preez, had meantime been ordered to take a reinforcement of 150 men to Pieter's Heights, and was soon engaged in a desperate struggle in the locality situated between the Krugersdorpers' and the Middleburgers' positions. The situation was generally considered very serious when I arrived near the head laager at Modderspruit late in the evening of the 27th of February, unaware of the unfavourable turn things had taken during the day at Paardeberg, in the Cape Colony, and on the Tugela. We rode on that night to my laager at Potgietersdrift, but having to go by a roundabout way it took us till early next morning before we reached our destination. The first thing I saw on my arrival was a cart containing ten wounded men, who had just been brought in from the fighting line, all yellow with lyddite.

Field-cornet P. van der Byl, who came fresh from the fight near Pieter's Heights, told me that these burghers had been wounded there. I asked him what had happened and how matters stood. "Ah, Commandant," he replied, "things are in a very bad way! Commandant Du Preez and myself were called to Pieter's Heights three days ago, as the enemy wanted to force their way through. We were in a very awkward position, the enemy storming us again and again; but we held our own, and fired on the soldiers at 50 paces. The English, directed an uninterrupted gun fire at our commandos, and wrought great havoc. Early Sunday morning the other side asked for a truce to enable them to bury their dead who were lying too close to our positions to be got at during the fighting. Many

of their wounded were lying there as well, and the air was rent during 24 hours with their agonised groans, which were awful to hear. We, therefore, granted an armistice till 6 o'clock in the evening." (This curiously coincided in time with the refusal to Cronje at Paardeberg when he asked for an armistice in order to bury his dead).

"The enemy," continued the field-cornet, "broke through several positions, and while we were being fired at by the troops which were advancing on us, we were attacked on our left flank and in the rear. Assistant-Commandant Du Preez, and Field-Cornet Mostert, were both severely wounded, but are now in safe hands. Besides these, 42 of our burghers were killed, wounded, or taken prisoners; we could only bring 16 of our wounded with us. The Krugersdorpers, too, have suffered severely. The enemy has pushed through, and I suppose my burghers are now taking up a position in the "randten" near Onderbroekspruit."

Here was a nice state of things! When I had left my commando 15 days previously, we had had heavy losses in the battle of Vaalkrantz, and now again my burghers had been badly cut up. We had lost over 100 men in one month.

But there was no time to lose in lamenting over these matters, for I had just received information that General P. Cronje had been taken prisoner with 4,000 men. The next report was to the effect that the enemy was breaking through near Onderbroekspruit, and that some burghers were retiring past Ladysmith. I was still in telegraphic communication with the head laager, and at once wired to the Commandant-General for instructions. The answer was:—

"Send your carts back to Modderspruit (our headquarters) and hold the position with your mounted commandos."

The position indicated was on the Upper Tugela, on a line with Colenso. My laager was about 20 miles away from the head laager; the enemy had passed through On-

derbroekspruit, and was pushing on with all possible speed to relieve Ladysmith, so that I now stood in an oblique line with the enemy's rear. I sent out my carts to the southwest, going round Ladysmith in the direction of Modderspruit. One of my scouts reported to me that the Free State commandos which had been besieging Ladysmith to the south, had all gone in the direction of Van Reenen's Pass another brought the information that the enemy had been seen to approach the village, and that a great force of cavalry was making straight for us.

General Joubert's instructions were therefore inexplicable to me, and if I had carried them out I would probably have been cut off by the enemy. My burghers were also getting restless, and asked me "why, while all the other commandos were retiring, we did not move?" Cronje's surrender had had a most disheartening effect on them; there was, in fact, quite a panic among them. I mounted a high kopje from which I could see the whole Orange Free State army, followed by a long line of quite 500 carts and a lot of cattle, in full retreat, and enveloped in great clouds of red dust. To the right of Ladysmith I also noticed a similar melancholy procession. On turning round, I saw the English in vast numbers approaching very cautiously, so slowly, in fact, that it would take some time before they could reach us. Another and great force was rushing up behind them, also in the direction of Ladysmith.

It must have been a race for the Distinguished Service Order or the Victoria Cross to be won by the one who was first to enter Ladysmith. We knew that the British infantry, aided by the artillery, had paved the way for relief, and I noticed the Irish Fusiliers on this occasion, as always, in the van. But Lord Dundonald rushed in and was proclaimed the hero of the occasion.

Before concluding this chapter I should like to refer to a few incidents which happened during the Siege of

Ladysmith. It is unnecessary to give a detailed description of the destruction of "Long Tom" at Lombardskop or the blowing up of another gun west of Ladysmith, belonging to the Pretoria Commando. The other side have written enough about this, and made enough capital out of them; and many a D. S. O. and V. C. has been awarded on account of them.

Alas, I can put forward nothing to lessen our dishonour. As regards the "Long Tom" which was blown up, this was pure treachery, and a shocking piece of neglect, Commandant Weilbach, who ought to have defended this gun with the whole of his Heidelberg Commando, was unfaithful to his charge. The Heidelbergers, under a better officer, subsequently proved themselves excellent soldiers. A certain Major Erasmus was also to blame. He was continually under the influence of some beverage which could not be described as "aqua pura"; and we, therefore, expected little from him. But although the planning and the execution of the scheme to blow up "Long Tom" was a clever piece of work, the British wasted time and opportunity amusing themselves in cutting out on the gun the letters "R. A." (Royal Artillery), and the effect of the explosion was only to injure part of the barrel. After a little operation in the workshops of the Netherlands South African Railway Company at Pretoria under the direction of Mr. Uggla, our gun-doctor, "Long Tom's" mouth was healed and he could spit fire again as well as before. As to the blowing up of the howitzer shortly after, I will say the incident reflected no credit on General Erasmus, as he ought to have been warned by what happened near Lombardskop, and to have taken proper precautions not to give a group of starving and suffering soldiers an opportunity of penetrating his lines and advancing right up to his guns.

Both incidents will be an ugly blot on the history of this war, and I am sorry to say the two Boer officers have

never received condign punishment. They should, at any rate, have been called before the Commandant-General to explain their conduct.

The storming of Platrand (Cæsar's Camp), south-east of Ladysmith, on the 6th of January, 1900, also turned out badly for many reasons. The attack was not properly conducted owing to a jealousy amongst some of the generals and there was not proper co-operation.

The burghers who took part in the assault and captured several forts did some splendid work, which they might well be proud of, but they were not seconded as they should have been. The enemy knew that if they lost Platrand, Ladysmith would have to surrender; they therefore defended every inch of ground, with the result that our men were finally compelled to give way. And, for our pains, we sustained an enormous loss in men, which did not improve in any way the already broken spirit of our burghers.

CHAPTER XI.

THE GREAT BOER RETREAT.

THERE was clearly no help for it, we had to retreat. I gave orders to saddle up and to follow the example of the other commandos, reporting the fact to the Commandant-General. An answer came—not from Modderspruit this time, but from the station beyond Elandslaagte—that a general retreat had been ordered, most of the commandos having already passed Ladysmith, and that General Joubert had gone in advance to Glencoe. At dusk I left the Tugela positions which we had so successfully held for a considerable time, where we had arrested the enemy from marching to the relief of Ladysmith, and where so many comrades had sacrificed their lives for their country and their people.

It was a sad sight to see the commandos retreating in utter chaos and disorder in all directions. I asked many officers what instructions they had received, but nobody seemed to know what the orders actually were; their only idea seemed to be to get away as quickly as possible.

Finally, at 9 o'clock in the evening we reached Klip River, where a strange scene was taking place. The banks were crowded with hundreds of mounted men, carts and cattle mingled in utter confusion amongst the guns, all awaiting their turn to cross. With an infinite amount of trouble the carts were all got over one at a time. After a few minutes' rest I decided on consulting my officers, that we should cross the river with our men by another drift further up the stream, our example being followed by a number of other commandos.

I should point out here that in retreating we where going to the left, and therefore in perilous proximity to Ladysmith. The commandos which had been investing the town were all gone; and Buller's troops had already reached it from the eastern side, and there was really nothing to prevent the enemy from turning our rear, as we perforce had to pass Ladysmith on our way from the Tugela. When we had finally got through the drift late that evening, a rumour reached us that the British were in possession of Modderspruit, and so far as that road was concerned, our retreat was effectually cut off.

Shortly before the War, however, the English had made a new road which followed the course of the Klip River up to the Drakensbergen, and then led through the Biggarsbergen to Newcastle. This road was, I believe, made for military purposes; but it was very useful to us, and our wagons were safely got away by it.

Commandant D. Joubert, of the Carolina Commando, then sent a message asking for reinforcements for the Pretoria laager, situated to the north-west of Ladysmith. It was a dark night and the rain was pouring down in torrents, which rendered it very difficult to get the necessary burghers together for this purpose.

I managed, to induce a sufficient number of men to come together, and we rode back; but on nearing the Pretoria Laager, I found to my dismay that there were only 22 of us left. What was to be done? This handful of men was of very little use; yet to return would have been cowardly, and besides, in the meantime our laager would have gone on, and would now be several hours' riding ahead of us. I sent some burghers in advance to see what was happening at the Pretoria Laager. It seemed strange to me that the place should still be in the hands of our men, seeing that all the other commandos had long since retired. After waiting fully an hour, our scouts came back

with the information that the laager was full of English soldiers, and that they had been able to hear them quarrelling about the booty left behind by the burghers.

It was now two o'clock in the morning. Our Pretoria comrades were apparently safe, and considerably relieved we decided to ride to Elandslaagte which my men would have surely reached by that time. Our carts were sooner or later bound to arrive there, inasmuch as they were in charge of a field-cornet known to us as one of our best "retreat officers." I think it was splendid policy under the circumstances to appoint such a gentleman to such a task; I felt sure that the enemy would never overtake him and capture his carts. We followed the main road, which was fortunately not held by the enemy, as had been reported to us. On the way we encountered several carts and waggons which had been cast away by the owners for fear of being caught up by the pursuing troops. Of course the rumour that this road was in possession of the English was false, but it increased the panic among the burghers. Not only carts had been left behind, but, as was found in places, sacks of flour, tins of coffee, mattresses and other jettison, thrown out of the carts to lighten their burden.

On nearing Elandslaagte we caught up the rear of the fleeing commandos. Here we learned that Generals Botha and Meyer were still behind us with their commandos, near Lombardsdorp. We off-saddled, exhausted and half starving. Luckily some of the provisions of our commissariat, which had been stored here during the Ladysmith investment, had not been carried away. But, to our disgust, we found that the Commissariat-Commissioner had set fire to the whole of it, so we had to appease our hunger by picking half-burned potatoes out of a fire.

At 7 o'clock next morning General Botha and his men arrived at Elandslaagte and offsaddled in hopes of getting something to eat. They were also doomed to disappointment.

Such wanton destruction of God's bounty was loudly condemned, and had Mr. Pretorius, the Commissioner of Stores, not been discreet enough to make himself scarce, he would no doubt have been subjected to a severe "sjamboking." Later in the day a council of war was held, and it was decided that we should all stay there for the day, in order to stop the enemy if they should pursue us. Meantime we would allow the convoys an opportunity of getting to the other side of the Sunday River.

The British must have been so overjoyed at the relief of Ladysmith that Generals Buller and White did not think it necessary to pursue us, at any rate for some time, a consideration for which we were profoundly grateful. Methinks General Buller must have felt that he had paid a big price for the relief of Ladysmith, for it must have cost him many more lives than he had relieved. But in that place were a few Jingos (Natal Jingos) who had to be released, I suppose, at any costs.

My burghers and I had neither cooking utensils nor food, and were anxious to push forward and find our convoys; for we had not as yet learned to live without carts and commissariat. At dusk the generals—I have no idea who they were—ordered us to hold the "randjes" south of the Sunday River till the following day, and that no burghers were to cross the river. This order did not seem to please the majority, but the Generals had put a guard near the bridge, with instructions to shoot any burghers and their horses should they try to get to the other side; so they had perforce, to remain where they were. Now I had only 22 men under my command, and I did not think these would make an appreciable difference to our fighting force, so I said to myself: "To-night we shall have a little game with the generals for once."

We rode towards the bridge, and of course the guard there threatened to fire on us if we did not go back

immediately. My adjutant, rode up and said: "Stand back, you——! This is Commandant Viljoen, who has been ordered to hurry up a patrol at——" (mentioning some place a few miles away) "which is in imminent danger of being captured."

The guards, quite satisfied, stepped back and favoured us with a military salute as we rode by. When we had been riding a little way I heard someone ask them what "people" they were who had passed over the bridge, and I caught the words: "Now you will see that they will all want to cross."

I do not contend I was quite right in acting in this insubordinate manner, but we strongly objected to being put under the guard of other commandos by some one irresponsible general. I went on that night till we reached the Biggarsbergen, and next day sent out scouts in the direction of the Drakensbergen to inquire for the scattered remains of my commando. The mountains were covered with cattle from the laagers about Glencoe Station. The Boers there were cooking food, shoeing their horses, or repairing their clothes; in fact, they were very comfortable and very busy. They remarked: "There are many more burghers yonder with the General; we are quite sure of that." . . . . "The Commandant-General is near Glencoe and will stop the retreating men."

In short, as was continually happening in the War, everything was left to chance and the Almighty. Luckily General Botha had deemed it his duty to form a rearguard and cover our retreat; otherwise the English would have captured a large number of laagers, and many burghers whose horses were done up. But, whereas we had too little descipline, the English had evidently too much. It is not for me to say why General Buller did not have us followed up; but it seems that the British lost a splendid chance.

Some days went by without anything of note happening. My scouts returned on the third day and reported that my commando and its laager had safely got through, and could be expected the next day. Meanwhile I had procured some provisions at Glencoe, and for the time being we had nothing to complain about.

I was very much amused next day to receive by despatch-rider a copy of a telegram from Glencoe sent by General Joubert to General Prinsloo at Harrismith (Orange Free State) asking for information regarding several missing commandos and officers, amongst whom my name appeared, while the telegram also contained the startling news that my commando had been reported cut up at Klip River and that I had been killed in action! This was the second time that I had been killed, but one eventually gets used to that sort of thing.

I sent, by the despatch-rider, this reply:—

"I and my commando are very much alive!" Adding: "Tell the General we want four slaughter oxen."

The following day I received orders to attend a council of war which was to be held at Glencoe Station. The principal object of this gathering was to discuss further plans of operation, to decide as to where our next positions were to be taken, and where the new fighting line would be formed.

We all met at the appointed time in a big unoccupied hall near Glencoe Station, where General Joubert opened the last council that he was to conduct in this world. Over 50 officers were present and the interest was very keen for several reasons. In the first place we all desired some official information about the fate of General Cronje and his burghers at Paardeburg, and in the second place some expected to hear something definite about the intervention of which so much had been said and written of late. In fact many thought that Russia, France, Germany

or the United States of America would surely intervene so soon as the fortunes of war began to turn against us. My personal opinion was stated just before the war at a public meeting, held in Johannesburg, where I said: "If we are driven to war we must not rely for deliverance on foreign powers, but on God and the Mauser."

Some officers thought we ought to retire to our frontiers as far as Laing's Nek, and it was generally believed that this proposal would be adopted. According to our custom General Joubert opened the council with an address, in which he described the situation in its details. It was evident that our Commandant-General was very low-spirited and melancholy, and was suffering greatly from that painful internal complaint which was so soon to put an end to his career.

No less than eleven assisting commandants and fighting generals were present, and yet not one could say who was next in command to General Joubert. I spoke to some friends about the irregularities which occured during our retreat from Ladysmith: how all the generals were absent except Botha and Meyer, while the latter was on far from good terms with General Joubert since the unfortunate attack on Platrand. This was undoubtedly due to the want of co-operation on the part of the various generals, and I resolved if possible, to bring our army into a closer union. I therefore proposed a motion:—

"That all the generals be asked to resign, with the exception of one assistant commandant-general and one fighting general."

Commandant Engelbrecht had promiscd to second my proposal, but when it was read out his courage failed him. The motion, moreover, was not very well received, and when it was put to the vote I found that I stood alone, even my seconder having forsaken me. As soon as an opportunity presented itself I asked General Joubert who was to be second in command. My question was not

answered directly, but egged on by my colleagues, I asked whether General Botha would be next in command. To this he replied: "Yes, that is what I understand——"

And if I am not mistaken, this was the first announcement of the important fact that Botha was to lead us in future.

Much more was said and much arranged; some of the commandos were to go to Cape Colony and attempt to check the progress of Lord Roberts, who was marching steadily north after Cronje's surrender. Finally each officer had some position assigned to him in the mountain-chain we call the Biggarsbergen. I was placed under General Meyer at Vantondersnek, near Pomeroy, and we left at once for our destination. From this place a pass leads through the Biggarsbergen, about 18 miles from Glencoe Station.

CHAPTER XII.

DRIVEN FROM THE BIGGARSBERGEN.

WE spent the next few weeks in entrenching and fortifying our new positions. General Botha had left with some men for the Orange Free State which Lord Roberts, having relieved Kimberley, was marching through. General Joubert died about this time at Pretoria, having been twenty-one years Commandant-General of the South African Republic. He was without doubt one of the most prominent figures in the South Africa drama.

General Botha now took up the chief command and soon proved himself to be worthy of holding the reins. He enjoyed the confidence and esteem of our whole army, a very important advantage under our trying circumstances.

Assisted by De Wet he was soon engaged in organizing the commondos in the Orange Free State, and in attempting to make some sort of a stand against the British, who were now marching through the country in overwhelming numbers. In this Republic the burghers had been under the command of the aged General Prinsloo, who had become so downhearted that the supreme command was taken from him and given to General De Wet. Prinsloo surrendered soon after, in doing which he did his people his greatest service; it was, however, unfortunate that he should have succeeded in leading with him 900 burghers into the hands of the enemy.

In the Biggarsbergen we had nothing to do but to sleep, and eat, and drink. On two separate occasions, we were ordered to join others in attacking the enemy's

camp at Elandslaagte. This was done with much ado, but I would rather say nothing about the way in which the attacks were directed. It suffices to say that both failed miserably, and we were forced to retire quicker than we had come.

Our generals meantime, were very busy issuing innumerable circulars to the different commandos. It is impossible for me to remember the contents of all these curious manifestos, but one read as follows: —

"A roll-call of all burghers is to be taken daily; weekly reports are to be sent to headquarters of each separate commando, and the minimum number of burghers making up a field-cornetship are to be under a corporal; and these corporals are to hold a roll-call every day, and to send in weekly detailed reports of their men to the Field-Cornet and Commandant, who in his turn must report to the General."

Another lengthy circular had full instructions and regulations for the granting of "leave" to burghers, an intricate arrangement which gave officers a considerable amount of trouble. The scheme was known as the "furlough system," and was an effort to introduce a show of organisation into the weighty matter of granting leave of absence. It failed, completely to have its desired effect. It provided that one-tenth of each commando should be granted furlough for a fortnight and then return to allow another tenth part to go in its turn. In a case of sick leave, a doctor's certificate was required, which had to bear the counter-signature of the field-cornet; its possessor was then allowed to go home instead of to the hospital. Further, a percentage of the farmers were allowed from time to time to go home and attend to pressing matters of their farms, such as harvesting, shearing scheep, etc. Men were chosen by the farmers to go and attend to matters not only for themselves but for other farmers in their districts as well. The net result of all this was that when everybody who could on one pretext or another obtain furlough had done so, about a third of each commando was missing. My

burghers who were mostly men from the Witwatersrand Goldfields, could of course obtain no leave for farming purposes; and great dissatisfaction prevailed. I was inundated with conplaints about their unfair treatment in this respect and only settled matters with considerable trouble.

I agree that this matter had to be regulated somehow, and I do not blame the authorities for their inability to cope with the difficulty. It seemed a great pity, however, that the commandos should be weakened so much and that the fighting spirit should be destroyed in this fashion. Of course it was our first big war and our arrangements were naturally of a very primitive character.

It was the beginning of May before our friends the enemy, at Ladysmith and Elandslaagte, began to show some signs of activity. We discovered unmistakable signs that some big forward movement was in progress, but we could not discover on which point the attack was to be directed. Buller and his men were marching on the road along Vantondersnek, and I scented heavy fighting for us again. I gathered a strong patrol and started out to reconnoitre the position. We found that the enemy had pitched their camp past Waschbank in great force, and were sending out detachments in an easterly direction. From this I concluded that they did not propose going through Vantondersnek, but that they indended to attack our left flank at Helpmakaar. This seemed, to me at any rate, to be General Buller's safest plan.

Helpmakaar was east of my position; it is a little village elbowed in a pass in the Biggarsbergen. By taking this point one could hold the key to our entire extended line of defence, as was subsequently only too clearly shown. I pointed this out to some of our generals, but a commandant's opinion did not weigh much just then; nor was any notice taken of a similar warning from Commandant

Christian Botha, who held a position close to mine with the Swaziland burghers.

We had repeated skirmishes with the English outposts during our scouting expeditions, and on one occasion we suddenly encountered a score of men of the South African Light Horse.

We noticed them in a "donk" (a hollow place) thickly covered with trees and bushes, but not before we were right amongst them. It appears they mistook us for Englishmen while we thought at first they were members of Colonel Blake's Irish Brigade. Many of them shook hands with us, and a burgher named Vivian Cogell asked them in Dutch: "How are you, boys?"

To which an Englishman, who understood a little Dutch, answered: "Oh, all right; where do you come from?"

Vivian replied: "From Viljoen's commando; we are scouting."

Then the Englishman discovered who we were, but Vivian gave the man no time for reflection. Riding up to him, he asked. "What regiment do you belong to?"

"To the South African Light Horse," answered the Englishman.

"Hands up!" retorted Vivian, and the English-Afrikander threw down his gun and put up his hands.

"Hands up! Hands up! was the cry now universally heard, and although a few escaped the majority were disarmed and made prisoners. It had been made a rule that when a burgher captured a British soldier he should be allowed to conduct him to Pretoria, where he could then obtain a few days' leave to visit his family. This did much to encourage our burghers to make prisoners, although many lost their lives in attempting to do so.

The next day, General Buller marched on Helpmakaar, passing close to our position. We fired a few shots from our Creusot gun, and had several light skirmishes. The

enemy, however, concentrated the fire of a few batteries on us, and our guns were soon silenced.

General L. Meyer had arrived with some reinforcements close to Helpmakaar, but the position had never been strengthened, and the sole defending force consisted of the Piet Retief burghers, known as the "Piet Retreaters," together with a small German corps. The result was easy to predict. The attack was made, and we lost the position without seriously attempting to defend it. Buller was now, therefore, in possession of the key to the Boer position in Natal, a position which we had occupied for two months—and could therefore, have fortified to perfection—and whose strategic importance should have been known in its smallest details. I think our generals, who had a sufficient force at their disposal, of which the mobility has become world-famed, should have been able to prevent such a fiasco as our occupation of the splendid line of defence in the Biggarsbergen turned out to be.

Here, for the first time in the war, General Buller utilised his success, and followed up our men as they were retreating on Dundee. He descended by the main waggon track from Helpmakaar, and drove the commandos like sheep before him. I myself was obliged to move away in hot haste and join the general retreat. Once or twice our men attempted to make a stand, but with little success.

When we reached Dundee the enemy gradually slackened off pursuit, and at dark we were clear of them. Satisfied with their previous day's success, and sadly hampered by their enormous convoys, the English now allowed us to move on at our leisure.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE "GREAT POWERS" TO INTERVENE.

DURING the retreat of our army to the frontier of the Transvaal Republic nothing of importance occurred. Here again confusion reigned supreme, and none of the commandos were over-anxious to form rearguards. Our Hollander Railway Company made a point of placing a respectful distance between her rolling-stock and the enemy, and, anxious to lose as few carriages as possible, raised innumerable difficulties when asked to transport our men, provisions and ammunition. Our generals had meantime proceeded to Laing's Nek by rail to seek new positions, and there was no one to maintain order and discipline.

About 150 Natal Afrikanders who had joined our commandos when these under the late General Joubert occupied the districts about Newcastle and Ladysmith, now found themselves in an awkward position. They elected to come with us, accompanied by their families and live stock, and they offered a most heartrending spectacle. Long rows of carts and wagons wended their way wearily along the road to Laing's Nek. Women in tears, with their children and infants in arms, cast reproachful glances at us as being the cause of their misery. Others occupied themselves more usefully in driving their cattle. Altogether it was a scene the like of which I hope never to see again.

The Natal kaffirs now had an opportunity of displaying their hatred towards the Boers. As soon as we had left a farm and its male inhabitants had gone, they swooped down on the place and wrought havoc and ruin, plundering

and looting to their utmost carrying capacity. Some even assaulted women and children, and the most awful atrocities were committed. I attach more blame to the whites who encouraged these plundering bands, especially some of the Imperial troops and Natal men in military service. Not understanding the bestial nature of the kaffirs, they used them to help carry out their work of destruction, and although they gave them no actual orders to molest the people, they took no proper steps of preventing this.

When our commando passed through New-castle, we found the place almost entirely deserted, excepting for a few British subjects who had taken an oath of neutrality to the Boers.

I regret to have to state that during our retreat a number of irresponsible persons set fire to the Government buildings in that town. It is said that an Italian officer burned a public hall on no reasonable pretext; certainly he never received orders to that effect. As may be expected of an invading army, some of our burgher patrols and other isolated bodies of troops looted and destroyed a number of houses which had been temporarily deserted. But with the exception of these few cases, I can state that no outrages were committed by us in Natal, and no property was needlessly destroyed.

On our arrival at Laing's Nek a Council of War was immediately held to decide our future plans.

We now found ourselves once more on the old battlefields of 1880 and 1881, where Boer and Briton had met 20 years before to decide by trial of arms who should be master of the S. A. Republic. Traces of that desperate struggle were still plainly visible, and the historic height of Majuba stood there, an isolated sentinel, recalling to us the battle in which the unfortunate Colley lost both the day and his life.

I was told off to take up a position in the Nek where

the wagon-road runs to the east across the railway-tunnel, and here we made preparations for digging trenches and placing our guns. Soon after we had completed our entrenchments we once more saw the enemy. They were lying at Schuinshoogte on the Ingogo, and had sent a mounted corps with two guns to the Nek. Although we had no idea of the enemy's strength, we were fully prepared to meet the attack; the Pretoria, Lydenburg and other laagers were posted to the left on the summit of Majuba Hill, and other commandos held good positions on the east. But the enemy evidently thought that we had fled all the way back to Pretoria, and not expecting to find the Nek occupied, advanced quite unconcerned. We fired a few volleys at them, which caused them to halt in considerable surprise, and, replying with a little artillery fire, they quickly returned to Schuinshoogte. We had, however, to be on our guard both day and night. It was bitterly cold at the time and a strong easterly wind was blowing.

Next day something occurred which afforded a change to the monotony of our situation, namely, the arrival from Pretoria of Mr. John Lombaard, member of the First Volksraad for Bethel. He asked permission to address us and informed us that we need only hold out another fortnight, for news from Europe had reached them to the effect that the Great Powers had decided to put an end to the War. This communication emanating from such a semi-official source was believed by a certain number of our men, but I think it did very little to brighten up the spirits of the majority, or arouse them from the lethargy into which they seemed to have fallen. A fortnight passed, and a month, without us hearing anything further of this expected intervention, and I have never been able to discover on whose authority and by whose orders Mr. Lombaard made to us that remarkable communication.

Meantime, General Buller did not seem at all anxious to attack us, perhaps fearing a repetition of the "accidents" on the Tugela; or possibly he thought that our position was too strong. For some reason, therefore, Laing's Nek was never attacked, and Buller afterwards, having made a huge "detour," broke through Botha's Pass. Meanwhile, Lord Roberts and his forces were marching without opposition through the Orange Free State, and I was ordered to proceed to Vereeniging with my commando. We left Laing's Nek on the 19th of May, and proceeded to the Free State frontier by rail.

CHAPTER XIV.

DISPIRITED AND DEMORALISED.

OUR first intention was to proceed to Vereeniging, there to join General Botha's forces. At Klip River Station, that preceding Vereeniging, I was ordered, to leave my carts behind and proceed with my men to Vaalbank, as the enemy were advancing by forced marches, and had compelled all the other commandos to fall back on Vereeniging.

On our way we met groups of retreating burghers, each of whom gave us a different version of the position. Some said that the enemy had already swept past Vereeniging, others that they could not now be stopped until they reached Johannesburg. Further on we had the good fortune to encounter General Botha and his staff. The General ordered me to take up a position at the Gatsrand, near the Nek at Pharaohsfontein, as the British having split their forces up into two parts, would send one portion to cross the Vaal River at Lindeque's Drift, whilst the other detachments would follow the railway past Vereeniging. Generals Lemmer and Grobler were already posted at the Gatsrand to obstruct the enemy's progress.

I asked General Botha how we stood. He sighed, and answered: "If only the burghers would fight we could stop them easily enough; but I cannot get a single burgher to start fighting. I hope their running mood will soon change into a fighting mood. You keep your spirits up, and let us do our duty."

"All right, General," I answered, and we shook hands heartily.

We rode on through the evening and at midnight halted at a farm to give our horses rest and fodder. The owner of the farm was absent on duty, and his family had been left behind. On our approach the women-folk, mistaking us for Englishmen, were terrified out of their wits. Remembering the atrocities and horrors committed in Natal on the advance of the Imperial troops, they awaited the coming of the English with the greatest terror. On the approach of the enemy many women and children forsook their homes and wandered about in caves and woods for days, exposed to every privation and inclemency of the weather, and to the attacks of wandering bands of plundering kaffirs.

Mrs. van der Merwe whom we met here, was exceedingly kind to us and gave us plenty of fodder for our horses. We purchased some sheep, and slaughtered them and enjoyed a good meal before sunrise, and each one of us bore away a good-sized piece of mutton as provision for the future.

Our scouts, whom we had despatched over night, informed us that Generals Lemmer and Grobler had taken up their stand to the right of Pharaohsfontein in the Gatsrand, and that the English were approaching in enormous force.

By nine in the morning we had taken up our positions, and at noon the enemy came in sight. Our commando had been considerably reduced, as many burghers, finding themselves near their homes, had applied for twenty-four hours' leave, which had been granted in order to allow them to arrange matters before the advance of the English on their farms made it impossible. A few also had deserted for the time being, unable to resist the temptation of visiting their families in the neighbourhood.

Some old burghers approached us and hailed us with the usual "Morning, boys! Which commando do you belong to?"

"Viljoen's."

"We would like to see your Commandant," they answered.

Presenting myself, I asked: "Who are you, and where do you come from, and where are you going to?"

They answered; "We are scouts of General Lemmer and we came to see who is holding this position."

"But surely General Lemmer knows that I am here?"

"Very probably," they replied, "but we wanted to know for ourselves; we thought we might find some of our friends amongst you. You come from Natal don't you?"

"Yes," I answered sadly. "We have come to reinforce the others, but I fear we can be of little use. It seems to me that it will be here as it was in Natal; all running and no fighting."

"Alas!" they said, "the Free Staters will not remain in one position, and we must admit the Transvaalers are also very disheartened. However, if the British once cross our frontiers you will find that the burghers will fight to the bitter end."

Consoled by this pretty promise we made up our minds to do our best, but our outposts presently brought word that the British were bearing to the right and nearing General Grobler's position, and had passed round that of General Lemmer. Whilst they attacked General Grobler's we attacked their flank, but we could not do much damage, as we were without guns. Soon after the enemy directed a heavy artillery fire on us, to which we, being on flat ground, found ourselves dangerously exposed.

Towards evening the enemy were in possession of General Grobler's position, and were passing over the Gatsrand, leaving us behind. I ordered my commando to fall back on Klipriversberg, while I rode away with some adjutants to attempt to put myself in communication with the other commandos.

The night was dark and cloudy, which rendered it somewhat difficult for us to move about in safety. We occasionally fell into ditches and trenches, and had much trouble with barbed wire. However, we finally fell in with General Lemmer's rearguard, who informed us that the enemy after having overcome the feeble resistance of General Grobler had proceeded north, and all the burghers were retreating in haste before them.

We rode on past the enemy to find General Grobler and what his plans were. We rode quite close to the English camp, as we knew that they seldom posted sentries far from their tents. On this occasion, however, they had placed a guard in an old "klipkraal," for them a prodigious distance from their camp, and a "Tommy" hailed us from the darkness.—

"Halt!, who goes there?"

I replied "Friend," whereupon the guileless soldier answered:

"Pass friend, all's well."

I had my doubts, however. He might be a Boer outpost anxious to ascertain if we were Englishmen. Afraid to ride into ambush of my own men, I called out in Dutch:

"Whose men are you?"

The Tommy lost his temper at being kept awake so long and retorted testily, "I can't understand your beastly Dutch; come here and be recognized." But we did not wait for identification, and I rode off shouting back "Thanks, my compliments to General French, and tell him that his outposts are asleep."

This was too much for the "Tommy" and his friends, who answered with a folley of rifle fire, which was taken up by the whole line of British outposts. No harm was done, and we soon rode out of range. I gave up looking for General Grobler, and on the following morning rejoined my men at Klipriversberg.

It was by no means easy to find out the exact position of affairs. Our scouts reported that the enemy's left wing, having broken through General Grobler's position, were now marching along Van Wijk's Rust. I could, however, obtain no definite information regarding the right wing, nor could I discover the General under whose orders I was to place myself. General Lemmer, moreover, was suffering from an acute disease of the kidneys, which had compelled him to hand over his command to Commandant Gravett, who had proved himself an excellent officer.

General Grobler had lost the majority of his men, or what was more likely the case, they had lost him. He declared that he was unaware of General Botha's or Mr. Kruger's plans, and that it was absurd to keep running away, but he clearly did not feel equal to any more fighting, although he had not the moral courage to openly say so. From this point this gentleman did no further service to his country, and was shortly afterwards dismissed. The reader will now gather an idea of the enormous change which had come over our troops. Six months before they had been cheerful and gay, confident of the ultimate success of their cause; now they were downhearted and in the lowest of spirits. I must admit that in this our officers were no exception.

Those were dark days for us. Now began the real fighting, and this under the most difficult and distressing circumstances, and I think that if our leaders could have had a glimpse of the difficulties and hardships that were before us, they would not have had the courage to proceed any further in the struggle.

Early next morning (the 29th May, 1900) we reached Klipspruit, and found there several other commandos placed in extended order all the way up to Doornkop.

Amongst them was that of General De la Rey, who had come from the Western frontier of our Republic, and

that of General Snyman, whom I regard as the real defender and reliever of Mafeking, for he was afraid to attack a garrison of 1,000 men with twice that number of burghers.

Before having had time to properly fortify our position we were attacked on the right flank by General French's cavalry, while the left flank had to resist a strong opposing force of cavalry. Both attacks were successfully repulsed, as well as a third in the centre of our fighting line.

The British now marched on Doornkop, their real object of attack being our extreme right wing, but they made a feint on our left. Our line of defence was very extended and weakened by the removal of a body of men who had been sent to Natal Spruit to stop the other body of the enemy from forcing its way along the railway line and cutting off our retreat to Pretoria.

The battle lasted till sunset, and was especially fierce on our right, where the Krugersdorpers stood. Early in the evening our right wing had to yield to an overwhelming force, and during the night all the commandos had to fall back. My commando, which should have consisted of about 450 men, only numbered 65 during this engagement; our losses were two men killed. I was also slightly wounded in the thigh by a piece of shell, but I had no time to attend such matters, as we had to retire in haste, and the wound soon healed.

The next day our forces were again in full retreat to Pretoria, where I understood we were to make a desperate stand. About seven o'clock we passed through Fordsburg, a suburb of Johannesburg.

We had been warned not to enter Johannesburg, as Dr. Krause, who had taken from me the command of the town, had already surrendered it to Lord Roberts, who might shell it if he found commandos were there. Our larger commissariat had proceeded to Pretoria, but we wanted several articles of food, and strange to say the commissariat

official at Johannesburg would not give us anything for fear of incurring Lord Roberts' displeasure!

I was very angry; the enemy were not actually in possession of the town, and I therefore should have been consulted in the matter; but these irresponsible officials even refused to grant us the necessaries of life!

At this time there was a strong movement on foot to blow up the principal mines about Johannesburg, and an irresponsible young person named Antonie Kock had placed himself at the head of a confederacy with this object in view. But thanks to the explicit orders of General L. Botha, which were faithfully carried out by Dr. Krause, Kock's plan was fortunately frustrated, and I fully agree with Botha that it would have been most impolitic to have allowed this destruction. I often wished afterwards, however, that the British military authorities had shown as much consideration for our property.

We had to have food in any case, and as the official hesitated to supply us we helped ourselves from the Government Stores, and proceeded to the capital. The roads to Pretoria were crowded with men, guns, and vehicles of every description, and despondency and despair were plainly visible on every face.

CHAPTER XV.

OCCUPATION OF PRETORIA.

THE enemy naturally profited by our confusion to pursue us more closely than before. The prospect before us was a sad one, and we asked ourselves, "What is to be the end of all this, and what is to become of our poor people? Shall we be able to prolong the struggle, and for how long?"

But no prolongation of the struggle appeared to have entered into our enemy's minds, who evidently thought that he War had now come upon its last stage, and they were as elated as we were downhearted. They made certain that the Boer was completely vanquished, and his resistance effectually put an end to. At this juncture Conan Doyle, after pointing out what glorious liberty and progress would fall to the Boers' lot under the British flag, wrote :—

"When that is learned it may happen that they will come to date a happier life and a wider liberty from that 5th of June which saw the symbol of their nation pass for ever from the ensigns of the world."

Thus, not only did Lord Roberts announce to the world that "the War was practically over," but Conan Doyle did not hesitate to say the same in more eloquent style.

How England utterly under-estimated the determination of the Boers, subsequent events have plainly proved. It is equally plain that we ourselves did not know the strength of our resolution, when one takes into account the pessimism and despair that weighed us down in those dark days; and as the Union Jack was flying over our Government buildings

we might have exclaimed:—"England, we do not know our strength, but you know it still less!"

Nearly all the commandos were now in the neighbourhood of Pretoria, General Botha forming a rear-guard, and we determined to defend the capital as well as we could. But at this juncture some Boer officer was said to have received a communication from the Government, informing us that they had decided not to defend the town. A cyclist was taking this communication round to the different commandos, but the Commandant-General did not seem to be aware of it, and we tried in vain to find him so as to discover what his plans were. The greatest confusion naturally prevailed, and as all the generals gave different orders, no one knew what was going to be done. I believe General Botha intended to concentrate the troops round Pretoria, and there offer some sort of resistance to the triumphant forces of the enemy, and we had all understood that the capital would be defended to the last; but this communication altered the position considerably. Shortly afterwards all the Boer officers met at Irene Estate, near Pretoria, in a council of war, and were there informed that the Government had already forsaken the town, leaving a few "feather-bed patriots" to formally surrender the town to the English.

I thought this decision of easy surrender ridiculous and inexplicable, and many officers joined me in loud condemnation of it. I do not remember exactly all that happened at the time, but I know a telegram arrived from the Commandant-General saying that a crowd had broken open the Commissariat Buildings in Pretoria and were looting them. An adjutant was sent into Pretoria to spread an alarm that the English were entering the town, and this had the effect of driving all the looters out of it. Some of my own men were engaged in these predatory operations, and I did not see them again until three days after.

The English approached Pretoria very cautiously, and directed some big naval guns on our forts built round the town, to which we replied for some time with our guns from the "randten," south-west of the town; but our officers were unable to offer any organised resistance, and thus on the 5th of June, 1900, the capital of the South African Republic fell with little ado into the enemy's hands. Bloemfontein, the capital of the Orange Free State, had months before suffered the same fate, and thousands of Free Staters had surrendered to the English as they marched from Bloemfontein to the Transvaal. Happily, however, in the Free State President Steyn and General De Wet were still wide awake and Lord Roberts very soon discovered that his long lines of communication were a source of great trouble and anxiety to him. The commandos, meanwhile, were reorganised; the buried Mausers and ammunition were once more resurrected, and soon it became clear that the Orange Free State was far from conquered.

The fall of Pretoria, indeed, was but a sham victory for the enemy. A number of officials of the Government remained behind there and surrendered, together with a number of burghers, amongst these faint-hearted brethren being even members of the Volksraad and men who had played a prominent part in the Republic's history; while to the everlasting shame of them and their race, a number of other Boers entered at once into the English service and henceforth used their rifles to shoot at and maim their own fellowcountrymen.

CHAPTER XVI.

BATTLE OF DONKERHOEK ("DIAMOND HILL").

OUR first and best positions were now obviously the kopjes which stretched from Donkerhoek past Waterval and Wonderboompoort. This chain of mountains runs for about 12 miles E. and N.E. of Pretoria, and our positions here would cut off all the roads of any importance to Pietersburg, Middelburg, as well as the Delagoa Bay railway. We therefore posted ourselves along this range, General De la Rey forming the right flank, some of our other fighting generals occupying the centre, whilst Commandant-General Botha himself took command of the left flank.

On the 11th of June, 1900, Lord Roberts approached with a force of 28,000 to 30,000 men and about 100 guns, in order, as the official despatches had it, "to clear the Boers from the neighbourhood of Pretoria." Their right and left flanks were composed of cavalry, whilst the centre was formed of infantry regiments; their big guns were placed in good positions and their field pieces were evenly distributed amongst the different army divisions.

Towards sunset they began booming away at our whole 13 miles of defence. Our artillery answered their fire from all points with excellent results, and when night fell the enemy retired a little with considerable losses.

The battle was renewed next day, the enemy attempting to turn our right with a strong flanking movement, but was completely repulsed. Meanwhile I at Donkerpoort proper had the privilege of being left unmo-

lested for several hours. The object of this soon became apparent. A little cart drawn by two horses and bearing a white flag came down the road from Pretoria. From it descended two persons, Messrs. Koos Smit, our Railway Commissioner and Mr. J. F. de Beer, Chief Inspector of Offices, both high officials of the South African Republic. I called out to them from a distance.

"Halt, you cannot pass. What do you want?"

Smit said, "I want to see Botha and President Kruger. Dr Scholtz is also with us. We are sent by Lord Roberts."

I answered Mr. Smit that traitors were not admitted on our premises, and that he would have to stay where he was. Turning to some burghers who were standing near I gave instructions that the fellows were to be detained.

Mr. Smit now began to "sing small," and turning deadly pale, asked in a tremulous voice if there were any chance of seeing Botha.

"Your request," I replied, "will be forwarded." Which was done.

An hour passed before General Botha sent word that he was coming. Meanwhile the battle continued raging fiercely, and a good many lyddite bombs were straying our way. The "white-flaggists" appeared to be very anxious to know if the General would be long in coming, and if their flag could not be hoisted in a more conspicuous place. The burghers guarding them pointed out, however, that the bombs came from their own British friends.

After a while General Botha rode up. He offered a far from cordial welcome to the deputation.

Dr. Scholtz produced a piece of paper and said Lord Roberts had sent him to enquire why Botha insisted on more unnecessary bloodshed, and why he did not come in to make peace, and that sort of thing.

Botha asked if Scholtz held an authoritative letter or

document from the English general, to which the Doctor replied in the negative.

Smit now suggested that he should be allowed to see Mr. Kruger, but Botha declared, with considerable emphasis, "Look here, your conduct is nothing less than execrable, and I shall not allow you to see Mr. Kruger. You are a couple of contemptible scoundrels, and as for Dr. Scholtz, his certificate looks rather dubious. You will go back and give the following message to Lord Roberts:—

"That this is not the first time messages of this description are sent to me in an unofficial manner; that these overtures have also sometimes been made in an insulting form, but always equally unofficially. I have to express my surprise at such tactics on the part of a man in Lord Roberts' position. His Lordship may think that our country is lost to us, but I shall do my duty towards it all the same. They can shoot me for it or imprison me, or banish me, but my principles and my character they cannot assail."

One could plainly see that the consciencestricken messengers winced under the reproach. Not another word was said, and the noble trio turned on their heels and took their white flag back to Pretoria.

Whether Botha was right in allowing these "hands-uppers" to return, is a question I do not care to discuss, but many burghers had their own opinion about it. Still, if they had been detained by us and shot for high treason, what would not have been said by those who did not hesitate to send our own unfaithful burghers to us to induce us to surrender.

I cannot say whether Lord Roberts was personally responsible for the sending of these messengers, but that such action was extremely improper no one can deny. It was a specially stupendous piece of impudence on the part of these men, J. S. Smit and J. F. de Beer, burghers both, and highly placed officials of the S. A. Republic. They had thrown down their arms and sworn allegiance to an enemy, thereby committing high treason in the

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fullest sense of the word. They now came through the fighting lines of their former comrades to ascertain from the commanders of the republican army why the whole nation did not follow their example, why they would not surrender their liberty and very existence as a people and commit the most despicable act known to mankind.

"Pretoria was in British hands!" As if, forsooth, the existence of our nationality began and ended in Pretoria! Pretoria was after all only a village where such "patriots"(?) had for years been fattening on State funds, and, having filled their pockets, had helped to damage the reputation of a young and virile nation.

Not only had they enjoyed the spoils of high office in the State Service offices, to which a fabulous remuneration was attached, but they belonged to the Boer aristocracy, members of honourable families whose high birth and qualities had secured for them preference over thousands of other men and the unlimited confidence of the Head of State. Little wonder these gentlemen regarded the fall of Pretoria as the end of the war.

The battle continued the whole day; it was fiercest on our left flank, where General French and his cavalry charged the positions of the Ermelo and Bethel burghers again and again, each time to be repulsed with heavy losses. Once the lancers attacked so valiantly that a hand-to-hand fight ensued. The commandant of the Bethel burghers afterwards told me that during the charge his kaffir servant got among the lancers and called upon them to "Hand up!" The unsophisticated native had heard so much about "hands up," and "hands-uppers," that he thought the entire English language consisted of those two simple words, and when one lancer shouted to him "Hands up," he echoed "Hands up." The British cavalryman thrust his lance through the nigger's arm, still shouting "Hands up," the black man retreating, also vociferously shrieking "Hands up, boss; hands up!"

When his master asked him why he had shouted "Hands up" so persistently though he was running away, he answered: "Ah, boss, me hear every day people say, 'Hands up;' now me think this means kaffir 'Soebat' (to beg). I thought it mean, 'Leave off, please,' but the more I shouted 'Hands up' English boss prod me with his assegai all the same."

On our right General De la Rey had an equally awkward position; the British here also made several determined attempts to turn his flank, but were repulsed each time. Once during an attack on our right, their convoy came so close to our position that our artillery and our Mausers were enabled to pour such a fire into them that the mules drawing the carts careered about the veldt at random, and the greatest confusion ensued. British mules were "pro-Boer" throughout the War. The ground, however, was not favourable for our operations, and we failed to avail ourselves of the general chaos. Towards the evening of the second day General Tobias Smuts made an unpardonable blunder in falling back with his commandos. There was no necessity for the retreat; but it served to show the British that there was a weak point in our armoury. Indeed, the following day the attack in force was made upon this point. The British had meantime continued pouring in reinforcements, men as well as guns.

About two o'clock in the afternoon Smuts applied urgently for reinforcements, and I was ordered by the Commandant-General to go to his position. A ride of a mile and a half brought us near Smuts; our horses were put behind a "randje," the enemy's bullets and shells meantime flying over their heads without doing much harm. We then hurried up on foot to the fighting line, but before we could reach the position. General Smuts and his burghers had left it. At first I was rather in the dark as to what it all meant until we discovered that the British had won Smuts' position, and from it were firing upon us. We fell down flat behind

the nearest "klips" and returned the fire, but were at a disadvantage, since the British were above us. I never heard where General Smuts and his burghers finally got to. On our left we had Commandant Kemp with the Krugersdorpers; on the right Field-Cornet Koen Brits. The British tried alternately to get through between one of my neighbours and myself, but we succeeded, notwithstanding their fierce onslaught, in turning them back each time. All we could do, was to hold our own till dark. Then orders were given to "inspan" as the commandos would all have to retire.

I do not know the extent of the British losses in that engagement. My friend Conan Doyle wisely says nothing about them, but we knew they had suffered very severely indeed. Our losses were not heavy; but we had to regret the death of brave Field-Cornet Roelf Jansen and some other plucky burghers. Dr. Doyle, referring to the engagement, says:

"The two days' prolonged struggle (Diamond Hill) showed that there was still plenty of fight in the burghers. Lord Roberts had not routed them," etc.

Thus ended the battle of Donkerhoek, and next day our commandos were falling back to the north.

CHAPTER XVII.

I BECOME A GENERAL.

IN our retreat northwards the English did not pursue us. They contented themselves by fortifying the position we had evacuated between Donkerhoek and Wonderboompoort. Meantime our commandos proceeded along the Delagoa Bay Railway until we reached Balmoral Station, while other little divisions of ours were at Rhenosterkop, north of Bronkhorst Spruit.

I may state that this general retreat knocked the spirit out of some of our weaker brethren. Hundreds of Boers rode into Pretoria with the white flag suspended from their Mauser barrels. In Pretoria there were many prominent burghers who had readily accepted the new conditions, and these were employed by the British to induce other Boers within reach, by manner of all sorts of specious promises, to lay down their arms. Many more western district Boers quietly returned to their homes. Luckily, the Boer loves his Mauser too well to part with it, except on compulsion, and although the majority of these western Boers handed in their weapons, some retained them.

They retained their weapons by burying them, pacifying the confiding British officer in charge of the district by handing in rusty and obsolete Martini-Henris or a venerable blunderbuss which nobody had used since ancestral Boer shot lions with it in the mediæval days of the first great trek. The buried Mausers came in very useful afterwards.

About this time General Buller entered the Republic

from the Natal side, and marched with his force through the southern districts of Wakkerstroom, Standerton, and Ermelo. Hundreds of burghers remained on their farms and handed their weapons to the British. In some districts, for instance, at Standerton, the commandant and two out of his three field-cornets surrendered. Thus, not only were some commandos without officers, but others entirely disappeared from our army. Still, at the psychological moment a Joshua would appear, and save the situation, as, for instance, in the Standerton district where Assistant-Field-Cornet Brits led a forlorn hope and saved a whole commando from extinction. The greatest mischief was done by many of our landdrosts, who, after having surrendered, sent out communications to officers and burghers exhorting them to come in.

The majority of our Boer officers, however, remained faithful to their vow, though since the country was partly occupied by the British it was difficult to get in touch with the Commandant-General or the Government, and the general demoralisation prevented many officers from asserting their authority.

Generals Sarel Oosthuizen and H. L. Lemmer, both now deceased, were sent to the north of Pretoria, to collect the burghers from the western districts, and to generally rehabilitate their commandos. They were followed by Assistant-Commandant General J. H. De la Rey and State Attorney Smuts (our legal adviser). It was at this point, indeed, that the supreme command of the western districts was assumed by General De la Rey, who, on his way to the north, attacked and defeated an English garrison at Selatsnek.

The "reorganisation" of our depleted commandos proceeded very well; about 95 per cent. of the fighting Boers rejoined, and speedily the commandos in the western districts had grown to about 7,000 men.

But just a few weeks after his arrival in the West Krugersdorp district, poor, plucky Sarel Oosthuizen was severely wounded in the battle of Dwarsvlei, and died of his wounds some time after.

General H. Lemmer, a promising soldier, whom we could ill spare, was killed soon after while storming Lichtenburg under General De la Rey, an engagement in which we did not succeed. We had much trouble in replacing these two brave generals, whose names will live for all time in the history of the Boer Republics.

It is hardly necessary to dwell on the splendid work done by Assistant-Commandant-General De la Rey in the western districts. Commandant-General Botha was also hard worked at this stage, and was severely taxed reorganising his commandos and filling up the lamentable vacancies caused by the deaths of Lemmer and Oosthuizen.

I have already pointed out that General De la Rey had taken with him the remainder of the burghers from the western districts. The following commandos were now left to us:— Krugersdorp and Germiston, respectively, under the then Commandants J. Kemp and C. Gravett, and the Johannesburg police, with some smaller commandos under the four fighting generals, Douthwaith, Snyman (of Mafeking fame), Liebenberg, and Du Toit. The last four generals were "sent home" and their burghers with those of Krugersdorp, Germiston, Johannesburg, Boksburg and the Mounted Police, were placed under my command, while I myself was promoted to the rank of General. I had now under me 1,200 men, all told—a very fair force.

I can hardly describe my feelings on hearing of my promotion to such a responsible position. For the first time during the War I felt a sort of trepidation. I had all sorts of misgivings; how should I be able to properly guard the interests of such a great commando? Had I

a right to do so? Would the burghers be satisfied? It was all very well to say that they would have to be satisfied, but if they had shown signs of dissatisfaction I should have felt bound to resign. I am not in the habit of blinking at facts; they are stern things. What was to become of me if I had to tender my resignation? I was eager and rash, like most young officers, for although the prospects of our cause were not brilliant and our army had suffered some serious reverses, I still had implicit faith in the future, and above all, in the justice of the cause for which we were fighting. And I knew, moreover, that the burghers we now had left with us were determined and firm.

There was only one way open to me: to take the bull by the horns. I thought it my duty to go the round of all the commandos, call the burghers together, tell them I had been appointed, ask them their opinion on the appointment, and give them some particulars of the new organisation.

I went to the Krugersdorp Commando first. All went well, and the burghers comprising the force received me very cordially. There was a lot of questioning and explanations; one of the commandants was so moved by my address that he requested those who were present to conclude the meeting by singing Psalm 134, verse 3, after which he exhorted his fellow burghers in an impassioned speech to be obedient and determined.

The worst of it was that he asked me to wind up by offering a prayer. I felt as if I would gladly have welcomed the earth opening beneath me. I had never been in such a predicament before. To refuse; to have pleaded exoneration from this solemn duty, would have been fatal, for a Boer general is expected, amongst other things, to conduct all proceedings of a religious character. And not only Boer generals are required to do this thing, but all subordinate officers, and an officer who cannot offer a suitable

prayer generally receives a hint that he is not worthy of his position. In these matters the burghers are backed up by the parsons.

There was, therefore, no help for it; I felt like a stranger in Jerusalem, and resolved to mumble a bit of a prayer as well as I could. I need not say it was short, but I doubt very much whether it was appropriate, for all sorts of thoughts passed through my head, and I felt as if all the bees in this world were buzzing about my ears. Of course I had to shut my eyes; I knew that. But I had, mereover, to screw them up, for I knew that everybody was watching me. I closed my eyes very tightly, and presently there came a welcome "Amen."

My old commando was now obliged to find a new commandant and I had to take leave of them in that capacity. I was pleased to find the officers and men were sorry to lose me as their commandant, but they said they were proud of the distinction that had been conferred upon me. Commandant F. Pienaar, who took my place, had soon to resign on account of some rather serious irregularities. My younger brother, W. J. Viljoen, who, at the time of writing is, I believe, still in this position, replaced him.

At the end of June my commandos marched from Balmoral to near Donkerhoek in order to get in touch with the British. Only a few outpost skirmishes took place.

My burghers captured half a score of Australians near Van der Merwe Station, and three days afterwards three Johannesburgers were surprised near Pienaarspoort. As far as our information went the Donkerhoek Kopjes were in possession of General Pole-Carew, and on our left General Hutton with a strong mounted force, was operating near Zwavelpoort and Tigerspoort. We had some sharp fighting with this force for a couple of days, and had to call in reinforcements from the Middelburg and Boksburg commandos.

The fighting line by this time had widely extended

and was at least sixty miles in length; on my right I had General D. Erasmus with the Pretoria commando, and farther still to the right, nearer the Pietersburg railway, the Waterberg and Zoutpansberg commandos were positioned. General Pole-Carew tried to rush us several times with his cavalry, but had to retire each time. Commandant-General Botha finally directed us to attack General Hutton's position, and I realised what this involved. It would be the first fight I had to direct as a fighting general. Much would depend on the issue, and I fully understood that my influence with, and my prestige among the burghers in the future was absolutely at stake.

General Hutton's main force was encamped in a "donk" at the very top of the randt, almost equidistant from Tigerspoort, Zwavelpoort and Bapsfontein. Encircling his laager was another chain of "randten" entirely occupied and fortified, and we soon realised what a large and entrenched stretch of ground it was. The Commandant-General, accompanied by the French, Dutch, American and Russian attachés, would follow the attack from a high point and keep in touch with me by means of a heliograph, thus enabling Botha to keep well posted about the course of the battle. and to send instructions if required.

During the night of the 13th of July we marched in the following order: On the right were the Johannesburg and Germiston commandos; in the centre the Krugersdorp and the Johannesburg Police; and on the left the Boksburg and Middelburg commandos. At daybreak I ordered a general storming of the enemy's entrenchments. I placed a Krupp gun and a Creusot on the left flank, another Krupp and some pom-poms to the right, while I had an English 15-pounder (an Armstrong) mounted in the centre. Several positions were taken by storm with little or no fighting. It was my right flank which met with the only stubborn resistance from a strongly fortified point occupied by a company of Australians.

Soon after this position was in our possession, and we had taken 32 prisoners, with a captain and a lieutenant. When Commandant Gravett had taken the first trenches we were stubbornly opposed in a position defended by the Irish Fusiliers, who were fighting with great determination. Our burghers charged right into the trenches; and a hand-to-hand combat ensued. The butt-ends of the guns were freely used, and lumps of rock were thrown about. We made a few prisoners and took a pom-pom, which, to my deep regret, on reinforcements with guns coming up to the enemy, we had to abandon, with a loss of five men. Meanwhile, the Krugersdorpers and Johannesburg Police had succeeded in occupying other positions and making several prisoners, while half a dozen dead and wounded were left on the field.

The ground was so exposed that my left wing could not storm the enemy's main force, especially as his outposts had noticed our march before sunrise and had brought up a battery of guns, and in this flat field a charge would have cost too many lives.

We landed several shells into the enemy's laager, and if we had been able to get nearer he would certainly have been compelled to run.

When darkness supervened we retired to our base with a loss of two killed and seven wounded; whereas 45 prisoners and 20 horses with saddles and accoutrements were evidence that we had inflicted a severe loss upon the enemy. So far as I know, the Commandant-General was satisfied with my work. On the day after the fight I met an attaché. He spoke in French, of which language I know nothing. My Gallic friend then tried to get on in English, and congratulated me in the following terms with the result of the fight: "I congratuly very much you, le Général; we think you good man of war." It was the first time I had bulked in anyone's opinion as largely as a battleship; but I suppose his intentions were good enough.

A few days afterwards Lord Roberts sent a hundred women and children down the line to Van der Merwe Station, despite Botha's vehement protests. It fell to my lot to receive these unfortunates, and to send them on by rail to Barberton, where they could find a home. I shall not go into a question which is still *sub judice;* nor is it my present purpose to discuss the fairness and unfairness of the war methods employed against us. I leave that to abler men. I shall only add that these waifs were in a pitiful position, as they had been driven from their homes and stripped of pretty nearly everything they possessed.

Towards the end of July Carrington marched his force to Rustenburg, and thence past Wonderboompoort, while another force proceeded from Olifantsfontein in the direction of Witbank Station. We were, therefore, threatened on both sides and obliged to fall back on Machadodorp.

CHAPTER XVIII.

OUR CAMP BURNED OUT.

THE beginning of August saw my commandos falling back on Machadodorp. Those of Erasmus and Grobler remained where they were for the time being, until the latter was discharged for some reason or other and replaced by Attorney Beyers. General Erasmus suffered rather worse, for he was deprived of his rank as a general and reduced to the level of a commandant on account of want of activity.

Our retreat to Machadodorp was very much like previous experiences of the kind; we were continually expecting to be cut off from the railway by flanking movements and this we had to prevent because we had placed one of our big guns on the rails in an armour-clad railway carriage. The enemy took care to keep out of rifle range, and the big gun was an element of strength we could ill afford to lose. Besides, our Government were now moving about on the railway line near Machadodorp, and we had to check the enemy at all hazards from stealing a march on us. Both at Witbank Station and near Middelburg and Pan Stations we had skirmishes, but not inportant enough to describe in detail.

After several unsuccessful attempts, the Boer Artillery at last managed to fire the big gun without a platform. It was tedious work, however, as "Long Tom" was exceedingly heavy, and it usually took twenty men to serve it. The mouth was raised from the "kastion" by means of a pulley, and the former taken away; then and not till then could the gunner properly get the range. The carriage vacuum sucking apparatus had to be well fixed in hard ground to prevent recoil.

The enemy repeatedly sent a mounted squad to try and take this gun, and then there was hard fighting.

One day while we were manœuvring with the "Long Tom," the veldt burst into flames, and the wind swept them along in our direction like lightning. Near the gun were some loads of shells and gunpowder, and we had to set all hands at work to save them. While we were doing this the enemy fired two pompoms at us from about 3,000 yards, vastly to our inconvenience.

As my commando formed a sort of centre for the remainder, Commandant-General Botha was, as a rule, in our immediate neighbourhood, which made my task much easier, our generalissimo taking the command in person on several occasions, if required, and assisting in every possible way.

The enemy pursued us right up to Wonderfontein Station (the first station south-west of Belfast), about 15 miles from Dalmanutha or Bergendal, and waited there for Bullers's army to arrive from the Natal frontier.

We occupied the "randten" between Belfast and Machadodorp, and waited events. While we were resting there Lord Roberts sent us 250 families from Pretoria and Johannesburg in open trucks, notwithstanding the bitterly cold weather and the continual gusts of wind and snow. One can picture to oneself the deplorable condition we found these women and children in.

But, with all this misery, we still fourd them full of enthusiasm, especially when the trucks in which they had to be sent on down the line were covered with Transvaal and Free State flags. They sang our National Anthem as if they had not a care in the world.

Many burghers found their families amongst these exiles, and some heartrending scenes were witnessed. Luckily the railway to Barberton was still in our possession, and at Belfast the families were taken over from the British autho-

rities, to be sent to Barberton direct. While this was being done near Belfast under my direction, the unpleasant news came that our camp was entirely destroyed by a grass fire.

The Commandant-General and myself had set up our camp near Dalmanutha Station. It consisted of twelve tents and six carts. This was Botha's headquarters, as well as of his staff and mine. When we came to the spot that night we found everything burned save the iron tyres of the waggon wheels, so that the clothes we had on were all we had left us. All my notes had perished, as well as other documents of value. I was thus deprived of the few indispensable things which had remained to me, for at Elandslaagte my "kit" had also fallen into the hands of the British. The grass had been set on fire by a kaffir to the windward of the camp. The wind had turned everything into a sea of fire in less than no time, and the attempts at stamping out the flames had been of no avail. One man gave us a cart, another a tent; and the harbour at Delagoa Bay being still open (although the Portuguese had become far from friendly towards us after the recent British victories) we managed to get the more urgent things we wanted. Within a few days we had established a sort of small camp near to headquarters.

We had plenty to do at this time—building fortresses and digging trenches for the guns. This of course ought to have been done when we were still at Donkerhoek by officers the Commandant-General had sent to Machadodorp for the purpose. We had made forts for our "Long Toms," which were so well hidden from view behind a rand that the enemy had not discovered them, although a tunnel would have been neccessary in order to enable us to use them in shelling the enemy. We were therefore obliged to set to work again, and the old trenches were abandoned. The holes may surprise our posterity, by the way, as a display of the splendid architectural abilities of their ancestors.

CHAPTER XIX.

BATTLE OF BERGENDAL (MACHADODORP).

LET us pass on to the 21st of August, 1900. Buller's army had by this time effected a junction with that of Lord Roberts' between Wonderfontein and Komati River. The commandos under Generals Piet Viljoen and Joachim Fourie had now joined us, and taken up a position on our left, from Rooikraal to Komati Bridge. The enemy's numbers were estimated at 60,000, with about 130 guns, including twelve 4.7 naval guns, in addition to the necessary Maxims.

We had about 4,000 men at the most with six Maxims and about thirteen guns of various sizes. Our extreme left was first attacked by the enemy while they took possession of Belfast and Monument Hill, a little eastward, thereby threatening the whole of our fighting lines. My commandos were stationed to the right and left of the railway and partly round Monument Hill. Fighting had been going on at intervals all day long, between my burghers and the enemy's outposts. The fighting on our left wing lasted till late in the afternoon, when the enemy was repulsed with heavy losses; while a company of infantry which had pushed on too far during the fighting, through some misunderstanding or something of that sort, were cut off and captured by the Bethel burghers.

The attack was renewed the next morning, several positions being assailed in turn, while an uninterrupted gunfire was kept up. General Buller was commanding the enemy's right flank and General French was in charge of

the left. We were able to resist all attacks and the battle went on for six days without a decisive result. The enemy had tried to break through nearly every weak point in our fighting line and found out that the key to all our positions existed in a prominent "randje" to the right of the railway. This point was being defended by our brave Johannesburg police, while on the right were the Krugersdorpers and Johannesburgers and to the burghers from Germiston. Thus we had another "Spion Kop" fight for six long days. The Boers held their ground with determination, and many charges were repulsed by the burghers with great bravery. But the English were not to be discouraged by the loss of many valiant soldiers and any failure to dislodge the Boers from the "klip-kopjes." They were admirably resolute; but then they were backed up by a superior force of soldiers and artillery.

On the morning of the 27th of August the enemy were obviously bent on concentrating their main force on this "randje." There were naval guns shelling it from different directions, while batteries of field-pieces pounded away incessantly. The "randje" was enveloped by a cloud of smoke and dust. The British Infantry charged under cover of the guns, but the Police and burghers made a brave resistance. The booming of cannon went on without intermission, and the storming was repeated by regiment upon regiment. Our gallant Lieutenant Pohlman was killed in this action, and Commandant Philip Oosthuizen was wounded while fighting manfully against overwhelming odds at the head of his burghers. An hour before sunset the position fell into the hands of the enemy. Our loss was heavy— two officers, 18 men killed or wounded, and 20 missing.

Thus ended one of the fiercest fights of the war. With the exception of the battle of Vaalkrantz (on the Tugela) our commandos had been exposed to the heaviest

and most persistent bombardment they had yet experienced. It was by directing an uninterrupted rifle from all sides on the lost "randje" that we kept the enemy employed and prevented them from pushing on any farther that evening.

At last came the final order for all to retire via Machadodorp.

CHAPTER XX.

TWO THOUSAND BRITISH PRISONERS RELEASED.

AFTER the battle of Bergendal there was another retreat. Our Government, which had fled from Machadodorp to Waterval Station, had now reached Nelspruit, three stations further down the line, still "attended," shall I say, by a group of Boer officials and members of the Volksraad, who preferred the shelter of Mr. Kruger's fugitive skirts to any active fighting. There were also hovering about this party half a dozen Hebraic persons of extremely questionable character, one of whom had secured a contract for smuggling in clothes from Delagoa Bay, and another one to supply coffee and sugar to the commandos. As a rule, some official or other made a nice little commission out of these transactions, and many burghers and officers expressed their displeasure and disgust at these matters; but so it was, and so it remained. That same night we marched from Machadodorp to Helvetia, where we halted while a commando was appointed to guard the railway at Waterval Boven.

The next morning a big cloud of dust arose. "*De Engelse kom*" (the English are coming) was the cry. And come they did, in overwhelming numbers. We fired our cannon at their advance guard, which had already passed Machadodorp: but the British main force stayed there for the day, and a little outpost skirmishing of no consequence occurred.

A portion of the British forces appeared to go from Belfast via Dullstroom to Lydenburg, these operations being only feebly resisted. Our commandos were now parcelled

out by the Commandant-General, who followed a path over the Crocodile River bridge with his own section, which was pursued by a strong force of Buller's.

I was ordered to go down the mountain in charge of a number of Helvetia burghers to try and reach the railway, which I was to defend at all hazards. General Smuts, with the remnant of our men went further south towards the road leading to Barberton. Early the next morning we were attacked and again obliged to fall back. That night we stayed at Nooitgedacht.

The Boer position at and near Nooitgedacht was unique. Here was a great camp in which 2,000 English prisoners-of-war were confined, but in the confusion the majority of their Boer guards had fled to Nelspruit. I found only 15 burghers armed with Martini-Henry rifles left to look after 2,000 prisoners. Save for "Tommy" being such a helpless individual when he has nobody to give him orders and to think for him, these 2,000 men might have become a great source of danger to us had they had the sense to disarm their fifteen custodians (and what was there to prevent them doing so?) and to destroy the railway, they would have been able not only to have deprived my commando of provisions and ammunition, but also to have captured a "Long Tom." There was, moreover, a large quantity of victuals, rifles, and ammunition lying about the station, of which nobody appeared to take any notice. Of the crowd of officials who stuck so very faithfully to the fugitive Government there was not one who took the trouble to look after these stores and munitions.

On arrival I telegraphed to the Government to enquire what was to be done with the British prisoners-of-war. The answer was: „You had better let them be where they are until the enemy force you to evacuate, when you will leave them plenty of food."

This meant that there would be more D. S. O's or

V.C's handed out, for the first "Tommies" to arrive at the prisoners' camp would be hailed as deliverers, and half of them would be certain of distinctions.

I was also extremely dissatisfied with the way the prisoners had been lodged, and so would any officer in our fighting line have been had he seen their condition and accommodation. But those who have never been in a fight and who had only performed the "heroic" duty of *guarding* prisoners-of-war, did not know what humanity meant to an enemy who had fallen into their hands.

So what was I to do?

To disobey the Government's orders was impossible. I accordingly resolved to notify the prisoners that, "for military reasons," it would be impossible to keep them in confinement any longer.

The next morning I mustered them outside the camp, and they were told that they had ceased to be prisoners-of-war, at which they seemed to be very much amazed. I was obliged to go and speak formally to some of them; they could scarcely credit that they were free men and could go back to their own people. It was really pleasant to hear them cheer, and to see how pleased they were. A great crowd of them positively mobbed me to shake hands with them, crying, "Thank you, sir; God bless you, sir." One of their senior officers was ordered to take charge of them, while a white-flag message was sent to General Pole-Carew to send for these fine fellows restored to freedom, and to despatch an ambulance for the sick and wounded. My messenger, however, did not succeed in delivering the letter, as the scouts of the British advance-guard were exceedingly drunk, and shot at him; so that the prisoners-of-war had to go out and introduce themselves. I believe they were compelled to overpower their own scouts.

Ten days afterwards an English doctor and a lieutenant of the 17th Lancers came to us, bringing a mule laden

with medical appliances and food. The English medico, Dr. Ailward, succeeded, moreover, in getting through our lines without my express permission.

Next morning I accompanied an ambulance train to transport the wounded British to the charge of the British agent at Delagoa Bay. Outside Nooitgedacht I found four military doctors with a field ambulance.

"Does this officer belong to the Red Cross?" I asked.

"No," was the answer, "he is only with us quite unofficially as a sympathetic friend."

"I regret," said I, "that I cannot allow this thing; you have come through our lines without my permission; this officer no doubt is a spy."

I wired at once for instructions, which, when received read: "That as a protest against the action of the English officers who stopped three of our ambulances, and since this officer has passed through our lines without permission, you are to stop the ambulance and dispatch the doctors and their staff, as well as the wounded to Lourenco Marques."

The doctors were very angry and protested vehemently against the order, which, however, was irrevocable. And thus the whole party, including the Lancers' doctor, were sent to Lourenco Marques that very day. The nearest English General was informed of the whole incident, and he sent a very unpleasant message the next day, of which I remember the following phrases:—

"The action which you have taken in this matter is contrary to the rules of civilised warfare, and will alter entirely the conditions upon which the War was carried on up to the present," etc.

After I had sent my first note we found, on inspection, some Lee-Metford cartridges and an unexploded bomb in the ambulance vans. This fact alone would have justified the retention of the ambulance.

This was intimated again in our reply to General Pole-Carew, and I wrote, *inter alia:* "*Re* the threat contained in your letter of the . . . . . I may say I am sorry to find such a remark coming from your side, and I can assure you that whatever may happen my Government, commandants, and burghers are firmly resolved to continue the War on our side in the same civilised and humane manner as it has hitherto been conducted."

This was the end of our correspondence in regard to this subject, and nothing further happened, save that the English very shortly afterwards recovered five out of the eight ambulances we had retained.

CHAPTER XXI.

A GOVERNMENT IN FLIGHT.

ABOUT this time President Steyn arrived from the Orange Free State and had joined President Kruger, and the plan of campaign for the future was schemed. It was also decided that Mr. Schalk Burger should assume the acting Presidentship, since Mr. Kruger's advanced age and feeble health did not permit his risking the hardships attendant on a warlike life on the veldt.

It was decided Mr. Kruger should go to Europe and Messrs. Steyn and Burger should move about with their respective commandos. They were younger men and the railway, would soon have to be abandoned.

We spent the first weeks of September at Godwan River and Nooitgedacht Station, near the Delagoa Bay railway, and had a fairly quiet time of it. General Buller had meanwhile pushed on with forces via Lydenburg in the direction of Spitskop and the Sabi, on which General Botha had been compelled to concentrate himself after falling back, fighting steadily, while General French threatened Barberton.

I had expected Pole-Carew to force me off the railway line along which we held some rather strong positions, and I intended to offer a stout resistance. But the English general left me severely alone, went over 'Dwaalheuvel by an abandoned wagon-track, and crossed the plateau of the mountains, probably to try and cut us off through the pass near Duivelskantoor. I tried hard, with the aid of 150 burghers, to thwart his plans and we had some fighting.

But the locality was against us, and the enemy with their great force of infantry and with the help of their guns forced us to retire.

About the 11th of September I was ordered to fall back along the railway, via Duivelskantoor and Nelspruit Station, since General Buller was threatening Nelspruit in the direction of Spitskop, while General French with a great force was nearing Barberton. It appeared extremely likely that we should be surrounded very soon. We marched through the Godwan River and over the colossal mountain near Duivelskantoor, destroying the railway bridges behind us. The road we followed was swamped by the heavy rains and nearly impassable. Carts were continually being upset, breakdowns were frequent, and our guns often stuck in the swampy ground. To make matters worse, a burgher on horseback arrived about midnight to tell us that Bullers's column had taken Nelspruit Station, and cut off our means of retreat. Yet we had to pass Nelspruit; there was no help for it. I gave instructions for the waggons and carts (numbering over a hundred), to push on as quickly as possible, and sent out a strong mounted advance guard to escort them.

I myself went out scouting with some burghers, for I wanted to find out before daybreak whether Nelspruit was really in the hands of the enemy or not. In that case our carts and guns would have te be destroyed or hidden, while the commando would have to escape along the footpaths. We crept up to the station, and just at dawn, when we were only a hundred paces away from it, a great fire burst out, accompanied by occasional loud reports. This somewhat reassured me. I soon found our own people to be in possession burning things, and the detonations were obviously not caused by the bursting of shells fired from field-pieces. On sending two of my adjutants—Rokzak and Koos Nel—to the station to obtain further details, they soon came back

to report that there was nobody there except a nervous old Dutchman. The Burgher, who had told me Nelspruit was in the hands of the enemy, must have dreamt it.

The conflagration I found was caused by a quantity of "kastions" and ammunition-waggons which had been set afire on the previous day, while the explosions emanated from the shells which had been left among their contents.

The enemy's advance guard had pushed on to Shamoham and Sapthorpe, about 12 miles from the railway, enabling the whole of my commando to pass. We arrived at Nelspruit by eight o'clock. That day we rested and discussed future operations, feeling that our prospects seemed to grow worse every day.

The station presented a sad spectacle. Many trucks loaded with victuals, engines, and burst gun-carriages—everything had been left behind at the mercy of the first-comer, while a large number of kaffirs were plundering and stealing. Only the day before the Government had had its seat there, and how desolate and distressing the sight was now! The traces of a fugitive Government were unmistakable. Whatever might have been our optimism before, however little inclination the burghers might have felt to surrender, however great the firmness of the officers, and their resolve to keep the beloved "Vierkleur" flying, scenes like those at Nooitgedacht, and again at Nelspruit, were enough to make even the strongest and most energetic lose all courage. Many men could not keep back their tears at the disastrous spectacle, as they thought of the future of our country and of those who had been true to her to the last.

Kaffirs, as I said, had been making sad havoc among the provisions, clothes and ammunition, and I ordered them to be driven away. Amongst the many railway-waggons I found some loaded with clothes the fighting burghers had in vain and incessantly been asking for, also cannon

and cases of rifle ammunition. We also came across a great quantity of things belonging to our famous medical commission, sweets, beverages, etc. The suspicion which had existed for some considerable time against this commission was therefore justified. There was even a carriage which had been used by some of its members, beautifully decorated, with every possible comfort and luxury, one compartment being filled with bottles of champagne and valuable wines. My officers, who were no saints, saw that our men were well provided for out of these. The remainder of the good things was shifted on to a siding, where about twenty engines were kept. By great good luck the Government commissariat stock, consisting of some thousands of sheep, and even some horses, had also been left behind. But we were not cheered.

Among the many questions asked regarding this sad state of affairs was one put by an old burger:

"Dat is nou die plan, want zooals zaken hier lyk, dan heeft die boel in wanhoop gevlug." ("Is that the plan, then? For from what I can see of it, they have all fled in despair.")

I answered, "Perhaps they were frightened away, Oom."

"Ja," he said, "but look, General, it seems to me as if our members of the Government do not intend to continue the war. You can see this by the way they have now left everything behind for the second time."

"No, old Oom," I replied, "we should not take any notice of this. Our people are wrestling among the waves of a stormy ocean; the gale is strong, and the little boat seems upon the point of capsizing, but it has not gone down as yet. Now and then the boat is dashed against the rocks and the splinters fly, but the faithful sailors never lose heart. If they were to do that the dinghy would soon go under, and the crew would disappear for ever. It would be the last page of their history, and their

children would be strangers in their own country. You understand, Oom?"

"Yes, General, but I shall not forget to settle up, for I myself and others with me have had enough of this, and the War has opened our eyes."

"All right, old man." I rejoined, "nobody can prevent you surrendering, but I have now plenty of work to do; so get along."

Burghers of different commandos who had strayed—some on purpose—passed us here in groups of two or ten or more. Some of them were going to their own districts, right through the English lines, others were looking for their cattle, which they had allowed to stray in order to evade the enemy. I could only tell them that the veldt between Nelspruit and Barberton up to Avoca, was, so far as I had been able to discover, full of cattle and waggons belonging to farmers who now had no chance of escaping. Everybody wanted some information from the General.

About half a score of burghers with bridle horses then came up. There was one old burgher among them with a long beard, a great veldt hat, and armed with a Mauser which seemed hardly to have been used. He carried two belts with a good stock of cartridges, a revolver, and a *tamaai* (long sjambok). This veteran strode up in grand martial style to where I was sitting having something to eat. As he approached he looked brave enough to rout the whole British army.

"Dag!" (Good morning.) "Are you the General?" asked the old man.

"Yes, I have the honour of being called so. Are you a field-marshal, a Texas Jack, or what?"

"My name is Erasmus, from the Pretoria district," he replied, "and my nine comrades and myself, with my family and cattle, have gone into the bush. I saw them all running away, the Government and all. You are close to the Por-

tuguese border, and my mates and I want to know what your plans are."

"Well," Mr. Erasmus, I returned, "what you say is almost true; but as you say you and your comrades have been hiding in the bush with your cattle and your wives, I should like to know if you have ever tried to oppose the enemy yet, and also what is your right to speak like this,"

"Well, I had to flee with my cattle, for you have to live on that as well as I."

"Right," said I; "what do you want, for I do not feel inclined to talk any longer."

"I want to know," he replied, "if you intend to retire, and if there is any chance of making peace. If not, we will go straight away to Buller, and 'hands-up,' then we shall save all our property."

"Well, my friend," I remarked, "our Government and the Commandant-General are the people who have to conclude peace, and it is not for you or me, when our family and cattle are in danger, to surrender to the enemy, which means turning traitor to your own people."

"Well, yes; good-bye, General, we are moving on now."

I sent a message to our outposts to watch these fellows, and to see if they really were going over to the enemy. And, as it happened, that same night my Boers came to camp with the Mausers and horses Erasmus and his party had abandoned. They had gone over to Buller.

The above is but an instance illustrating what often came under my notice during the latter period of my command. This sort of burgher, it turned out, invariably belonged to a class that never meant to fight. In many cases we could do better without them, for it was always these people who wanted to know exactly what was "on the cards," and whenever things turned out unpleasantly, they only misled and discouraged others. Obviously, we were better off without them.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN IGNOMINIOUS DISPERSAL.

COMMANDANT-GENERAL BOTHA, who was then invalided at Hector's Spruit Station, now sent word that we were to join him there without delay. He said I could send part of the commando by train, but the railway arrangements were now all disturbed, and everything was in a muddle. As nothing could be relied on in the way of transport, the greater number of the men and most of the draught beasts had to "trek."

At Crocodile Gat Station the situation was no better than at Nelspruit, and the same might be said of Kaapmuiden. Many of the engine drivers, and many of the burghers even, who were helping in destroying the barrels of spirits at the stations, were so excited (as they put it) through the fumes of the drink, that the strangest things were happening. Heavily-laden trains were going at the rate of 40 miles an hour. A terrible collision had happened between two trains going in different directions several burghers and animals being killed. Striplings were shooting from the trains at whatever game they saw, or fancied they saw, along the line, and many mishaps resulted. These things did not tend to improve matters.

It was not so much that the officers had lost control over their men. It seemed as if the Evil Spirit had been let loose and was doing his very best to encourage the people to riotous enjoyment.

Hector's Spruit is the last station but one before you come to the Portuguese frontier, and about seventeen miles

from Ressano Garcia. Here every commando stopped intending of course to push on to the north and then to cross the mountains near Lydenburg in a westerly direction. The day when I arrived at Hector's Spruit, President Steyn, attended by an escort of 100 men, went away by the same route. Meanwhile General Buller was encamped at Glyn's mines near Spitskop and the Sabi River, which enabled him to command the mountain pass near Mac Mac and Belvedere without the slightest trouble, and to block the roads along which we meant to proceed. Although the late Commandant (afterwards fighting General) Gravett occupied one of the passes with a small commando, he was himself in constant danger of being cut off from Lydenburg by a flank movement. On the 16th of September, 1900, an incident occurred which is difficult to describe adequately. Hector Spruit is one of the many unattractive stations along the Delegoa Bay railway situated between the great Crocodile river and dreary black "kopjes" or "randjes" with branches of the Cape mountains intervening and the "Low Veldts," better known as the "Boschveldt." This is a locality almost filled with black holly bushes, where you can only see the sky overhead and the spot of ground you are standing on. In September the "boschveldt" is usually dry and withered and the scorching heat makes the surroundings seem more inhospitable than ever.

The station was crowded with railway carriages loaded up with all sorts of goods, and innumerable passenger carriages, and the platform and adjoining places filled with agitated people. Some were packing up, others unpacking, and some, again, were looting. The majority were, wandering about aimlessly. They did not know what was happening; what ought to be done or would be done; and the only exceptions were the officers, who were busily engaged in providing themselves and their burghers with provisions and ammunition.

I now had to perform one of the most unpleasant duties I have ever known: that of calling the burghers together and telling them that those who had no horses were to go by train to Komati Poort, there to join General Jan Coetser. Those who had horses were to report themselves to me the next morning, and get away with me through the low fields.

Some burghers exclaimed; "We are now thrown over, left in the lurch, because we have not got horses; that is not fair."

Others said they would be satisfied if I went with them, for they did not know General Coetser.

Commandant-General Botha did not see his way to let me go to Komati Poort, as he could not spare me and the other commandos. Those of the men who had to walk the distance complained very bitterly, and their complaints were well-founded. I did my best to persuade and pacify them all, and some of them were crying like babies when we parted.

Komati Poort was, of course, the last station, and if the enemy were to drive them any further they would have to cross the Portuguese border, and to surrender to the Portuguese; or they could try to escape through Swaziland (as several hundreds did afterwards) or along the Lebombo mountains, via Leydsdorp. But if they took the latter route then they might just as well have stayed with me in the first place. It was along this road that General Coetser afterwards fled with a small body of burghers, when the enemy, according to expectations, marched on Komati Poort, and met with no resistance, though there were over 1800 of our men with guns there.

A certain Pienaar, who arrogated unto himself the rank of a general on Portuguese territory, fled with 800 men over the frontier. These, however, were disarmed and sent to Lisbon.

The end of the struggle was ignominious, as many a

burgher had feared; and to this day I pity the men who, at Hector's Spruit, had to go to Komati Poort much against their will.

Fortunately they had the time and presence of mind to blow up the "Long Tom" and other guns before going; but a tremendous lot of provisions and ammunition must have fallen into the hands of enemy.

At Hector's Spruit half a score of cannon of different calibre had been blown up, and many things buried which may be found some day by our progeny. Our carts were all ready loaded, and we were prepared to march next morning into the desert and take leave of our stores. How would we get on now? Where would we get our food, cut off as we were from the railway, and, consequently, from all imports and supplies? These questions and many others crossed our minds, but nobody could answer them.

Our convoys were ready waiting, and the following morning we trekked into the Hinterland Desert, saying farewell to commissariats and stores.

The prospect was melancholy enough. By leaving Hector's Spruit we were isolating ourselves from the outer world, which meant that Europe and civilisation generally could only be informed of our doings through English channels.

Once again our hopes were centred in our God and our Mausers.

Dr. Conan Doyle says about this stage of the war:—

"The most incredulous must have recognised as he looked at the heap of splintered and shattered gunmetal (at Hector's Spruit) that the long War was at last drawing to a close."

And here I am, writing these pages seventeen months later, and the War is not over yet. But Dr. Doyle is not a prophet, and cannot be reproached for a miscalculation of this character, for if I, and many with me, had been asked at the time what we thought of the future, we might have been as wide of the mark as Dr. Doyle himself.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A DREARY TREK THROUGH FEVERLAND.

THE 18th of September, 1900, found us trekking along an old disused road in a northerly direction. We made a curious procession, an endless retinue of carts, waggons, guns, mounted men, "voetgangers" nearly three miles long. The Boers walking comprised 150 burghers without horses, who refused to surrender to the Portuguese, and who had now joined the trek on foot. Of the 1,500 mounted Boers 500 possessed horses which were in such a parlous condition that they could not be ridden. The draught cattle were mostly poor and weak, and the waggons carrying provisions and ammunition, as also those conveying the guns, could only be urged along with great difficulty. In the last few months our cattle and horses had been worked hard nearly every day, and had to be kept close to our positions.

During this season the veldt in the Transvaal is in the very worst condition, and the animals are then poorer than at any other period. We had, moreover, the very worst of luck, kept as we were in the coldest parts of the country from June till September, and the rains had fallen later than usual. There was, therefore, scarcely any food for the poor creatures, and hardly any grass. The bushveldt through which we were now trekking was scorched by an intolerable heat, aggravated by drought, and the temperature in the daytime was so unbearable that we could only trek during the night.

Water was very scarce, and most of the wells which,

according to old hunters with us, yielded splendid supplies, were found to be dried up. The veldt being burned out there was not a blade of grass to be seen, and we had great trouble in keeping our animals alive. From time to time we came across itinerant kaffir tribes from whom we obtained handfuls of salt or sugar, or a pailful of mealies, and by these means we managed to save our cattle and horses.

When we had got through the Crocodile River the trek was arranged in a sort of military formation enabling us to defend ourselves, had we been attacked. The British were already in possession of the railway up to Kaapmuiden and we had to be prepared for pursuit; and really pursuit by the British seemed feasible and probable from along the Ohrigstad River towards Olifant's Nek and thence along the Olifant's River.

Our original plan was to cross the Sabi, along the Meritsjani River, over the mountains near Mac Mac, through Erasmus or Gowyn's Pass and across Pilgrim's Rest, where we might speedily have reached healthier veldt and better climatic conditions. President Steyn had passed there three days previously, but when our advance guard reached the foot of the high mountains, near Mac Mac, the late General Gravett sent word that General Buller with his force was marching from Spitskop along the mountain plateau and that it would be difficult for us to get ahead of him and into the mountains. The road, which was washed away, was very steep and difficult and contained abrupt deviations so that we could only proceed at a snail's pace.

Commandant-General Botha then sent instructions to me to take my commando along the foot of the mountains, via Leydsdorp, while he with his staff and the members of the Government would proceed across the mountains near Mac Mac. General Gravett was detailed to keep Buller's advance guard busy, and he succeeded admirably.

I think it was here that the British lost a fine chance

of making a big haul. General Buller could have blocked us at any of the mountain roads near Mac Mac, and could also have swooped down upon us near Gowyn's Pass and Belvedere. At the time of which I write Buller was lying not 14 miles away at Spitskop; two days after, he actually occupied the passes, but just too late to turn the two Governments and the Commandant-General. It might be said that they could in any case have, like myself, escaped along the foot of the mountains via Leydsdorp to Tabina and Pietersburg, but had the way out been blocked to them near Mac Mac, our Government and generalissimo would have been compelled to trek for at least three weeks in the low veldt before they could have reached Pietersburg, during which time all the other commandos would have been out of touch with the chief Boer military strategists and commanders, and would not have known what had become of their military leaders or of their Government. This would have been a very undesirable state of affairs, and would very likely have borne the most serious consequences to us. The British, moreover, could have occupied Pietersburg without much trouble by cutting off our progress in the low veldt, and barring our way across the Sabini and at Agatha. This coup could indeed have been effected by a small British force. In the mountains they would, moreover, have found a healthy climate, while we should have been left in the sickly districts of the low veldt. And had we been compelled to stay there for two months we would have been forced to surrender, for about the middle of October the disease among our horses increased and so serious was the epidemic that none but salted horses survived. The enteric fever would also have wrought havoc amongst us.

Another problem was whether all this would not have put an end to the war; we still had generals left, and strong commandos, and it was, of course, very likely that a great number of Boers driven to desperation would have

broken through, although two-thirds of our horses were not fit for a bold dash. Perhaps fifteen hundred out of the two thousand Boers would have made good their escape, but in any case large numbers of wagons, guns, etc. would have fallen into the British hands and our leaders might have been captured as well. The moral effect would have caused many other burghers from the other commandos to have lost heart, and this at a moment too, when they already required much encouragement.

This was my view of the situation, and I think Lord Roberts, or whoever was responsible, lost a splendid opportunity.

As regards my commando at the foot of the Mauch Mountains we turned right about and I took temporary leave of Louis Botha. It was a very affecting parting; Botha pressed my hand, saying, "Farewell, brother; I hope we shall get through all right. God bless you. Let me hear from you soon and frequently."

That night we encamped at Boschbokrand, where we found a store unoccupied, and a house probably belonging to English refugees, for shop and dwelling had been burgled and looted. After our big laager had been arranged, Boer fashion, and the camp fire threw its lurid light against the weird dark outline of the woods, the Boers grouped themselves over the veldt. Some who had walked twenty miles that day fell down exhausted.

I made the round of the laager, and I am bound to say that in spite of the trying circumstances, my burghers were in fairly cheerful spirits.

I discussed the immediate prospects with the officers, and arranged for a different commando to be placed in the advance guard each day and a different field-cornet in the rear. Boers conversant with the locality were detailed to ride ahead and to scout and reconnoitre for water.

When I returned that night to my waggon the evening meal was ready, but for the first time in my life I could eat nothing. I felt too dejected. My cook, Jan Smith, and my messmates were curious to know the reason I did not "wade in," for they always admired my ferocious appetite.

It had been a tiring day, and I pretended I was not well; and soon afterwards lay down to rest.

I had been sitting up the previous evening till late in the night, and was therefore in hopes of dropping off to sleep. But whatever I tried—counting the stars, closing my eyes and doing my best to think of nothing—it was all in vain.

Insurmountable difficulties presented themselves to me. I had ventured into an unhealthy, deserted, and worst of all, unknown part of the country with only 2,000 men. I was told we should have to cover 300 miles of this enteric-stricken country.

The burghers without horses were suffering terribly from the killing heat, and many were attacked by typhoid and malarial fever through having to drink a lot of bad water; these enemies would soon decimate our commando and reduce its strength to a minimum. And for four or five weeks we should be isolated from the Commandant-General and from all white men.

Was I a coward, then, to lie there, dejected and even frightened? I asked myself. Surely, to think nothing of taking part in a fierce battle, to be able to see blood being shed like water, to play with life and death, one could not be without some courage? And yet I did not seem to have any pluck left in me here where there did not seem to be much danger.

These and many similar thoughts came into my head while I was trying to force myself to sleep, and I told myself not to waver, to keep a cool head and a stout

heart, and to manfully go on to the end in order to reach the goal we had so long kept in view.

Ah, well, do not let anybody expect a general to be a hero, and nothing else, at all times; let us remember that "A man's a man for a' that," and even a fighting man may have his moments of weakness and fear.

The next morning, about four o'clock, our little force woke up again. The cool morning air made it bearable for man and beast to trek. This, however, only lasted till seven o'clock, when the sun was already scorching, without the slightest sign of a breeze. It became most oppressive, and we were scarcely able to breathe.

The road had not been used for twenty or thirty years, and big trees were growing in our path, and had to be cut down at times. The dry ground, now cut up by the horses' hoofs, was turned into dust by the many wheels, great clouds flying all round us, high up in the air, covering everything and everybody with a thick layer of ashy-grey powder.

About nine o'clock we reached Zand River, where we found some good water, and stayed till dusk. We exchanged some mealies against salt and other necessaries with some kaffirs who were living near by the water. Their diminutive, deformed stature was another proof of the miserable climate there.

There was much big game here; wild beasts, "hartebeest," "rooiboks" (sometimes in groups of from five to twenty at a time), and at night we heard the roaring of lions and the howling of wolves. Even by day lions were encountered. Now, one of the weakest points, perhaps the weakest, of an Afrikander is his being unable to refrain from shooting when he sees game, whether such be prohibited or not. From every commando burghers had been sent out to do shooting for our commissariat, but a good many had slipped away, so that hundreds of them were soon

hunting about in the thickly-grown woods. The consequence was that, whenever a group of them discovered game, it seemed as if a real battle was going on, several persons often being wounded, and many cattle killed. We made rules and regulations, and even inflicted punishments which did some good, but could not check the wild hunting instincts altogether, it being difficult to find out in the dark bush who had been the culprits.

Meanwhile the trek went on very slowly. On the seventh day we reached Blyde River, where we had one of the loveliest views of the whole "boschveldt." The river, which has its source near Pilgrim's Rest and runs into the great Olifant's River near the Lomboba, owes its name to trekker pioneers, who, being out hunting in the good old times, had been looking for water for days, and when nearly perishing from thirst, had suddenly discovered this river, and called it Blyde (or "Glad") River. The stream at the spot we crossed is about 40 feet wide, and the water as pure as crystal. The even bed is covered with white gravel, and along both banks are splendid high trees. The whole laager could outspan under their shade, and it was a delightful, refreshing sensation to find oneself protected from the burning sun. We all drank of the delicious water, which we had seldom found in such abundance, and we also availed ourselves of it to bathe and wash our clothes.

In the afternoon a burgher, whose name I had better not mention, came running up to us with his clothes torn to tatters, and his hat and gun gone. He presented a curious picture. I heard the burghers jeer and chaff him as he approached, and called out to him: "What on earth have you been up to? It looks as if you had seen old Nick with a mask on."

The affrighted Boer's dishevelled hair stood on end and he shook with fear.

He gasped: "Goodness gracious, General, I am nearly

dead. I had gone for a stroll to do a bit of hunting like, and had shot a lion who ran away into some brushwood. I knew the animal had received a mortal wound, and ran after it. But I could only see a yard or so ahead through the thick undergrowth, and was following the bloodstained track. Seeing the animal I put down my gun and was stepping over the trunk of an old tree; but just as I put my foot down, lo! I saw a terrible monster standing with one paw on the beast's chest. Oh, my eye! I thought my last hour had come, for the lion looked so hard at me, and he roared so awfully. By jove, General, if this had been an Englishman I should just have "hands-upped," you bet! But I veered round and went down bang on my nose. My rifle, my hat, my all, I abandoned in that battle, and for all the riches of England, I would not go back. General, you may punish me for losing my rifle, but I won't go back to that place for anything or anybody."

I asked him what the lion had done then, but he knew nothing more. Another burgher who stood by, remarked: "I think it was a dog this chap saw. He came running up to me so terrified that he would not have known his own mother. If I had asked him at that moment he would not have been able to remember his own name."

The poor fellow was roused to indignation, and offered to go with the whole commando and show them the lion's trail. But there was no time for that, and the hero had a bad time of it, for everybody was teasing and chaffing him, and henceforth he was called the "Terror of the Vaal."

We should have liked to have lingered a few days near that splendid and wholesome stream. We wanted a rest badly enough, but it was not advisable on account of the fever, which is almost invariably the penalty for sleeping near a river in the low veldt. One of the regulations of our commando forbade the officers and men to spend the night by the side of any water or low spot. It would also

have been fatal to the horses, for sickness amongst them and fever always coincide. But they did not always keep to the letter of these instructions. The burghers, especially those who had been walking, or arriving at a river, would always quickly undress and jump into the water, after which some of them would fall asleep on the banks or have a rest under the trees. Both were unhealthy and dangerous luxuries. Many burghers who had been out hunting or had been sent out provisioning, stayed by the riverside till the morning, since they could dispense with their kit in this warm climate. They often were without food for twenty-four hours, unless we happened to trek along the spot where they were resting. To pass the night in these treacherous parts on an empty stomach was enough to give anybody the fever.

When we moved on from Blyde River many draught beasts were exhausted through want of food, and we were obliged to leave half a dozen carts behind. This caused a lot of trouble as we had to transfer all the things to other vehicles, and field-cornets did not like to take up the goods belonging to other field-cornets' burghers, the cattle being in such a weak condition that it made every man think of his own division. No doubt the burghers were very kind to their animals, but they sometimes carried it too far, and the superior officers had often to interfere.

The distance from Blyde River to the next stopping place could not be covered in one day, and we should have no water the next; not a very pleasant prospect. The great clouds of dust through which we were marching overnight and the scorching heat in the daytime made us all long for water to drink and to clean ourselves. So when the order came from the laager commandants: "Outspan! No water to-day, my boys, you will have to be careful with the water on the carts. We shall be near some stream to-morrow evening," they were bitterly disappointed.

When we got near the water the following day eight

burghers were reported to be suffering badly from the typhoid fever, five of them belonging to the men who were walking. We had a very insufficient supply of ambulance waggons. I had omitted to procure a great number of these indispensable vehicles on leaving Hector's Spruit, for there had been so many things to look after. We were lucky to have with us brave Dr. Manning, of the Russian Ambulance, who rendered us such excellent assistance, and we have every reason to be thankful to H.M. the Czarina of Russia for sending him out. Dr. Manning had the patients placed in waggons, which had been put at his disposal for this purpose, but notwithstanding his skilled and careful treatment, one of my men died the following day, while the number of those who were seriously ill rose to fifteen. The symptoms of this fatal illness are; headache and a numb feeling in all the limbs, accompanied by an unusually high temperature very often rising to 104 and 106 degrees during the first 24 hours, with the blood running from the patient's nose and ears, which is an ominous sign. At other times the first symptom is what is commonly called "cold shivers."

We proceeded slowly until we came to the Nagout River, where the monotony and dreariness of a trek through the "boschveldt" were somewhat relieved by the spectacle of a wide stream of good water, with a luxurious vegetation along the banks. It was a most pleasant and refreshing sight to behold. For some distance along the banks some grass was found, to which the half-starved animals were soon devoting their attention. It was the sort of sweet grass the hunters call "buffalo-grass," and which is considered splendid food for cattle. We pitched our camp on a hill about one mile from the river, and as our draught-beasts were in want of a thorough rest we remained there for a few days. We had been obliged to drive along some hundreds of oxen, mules, and horses, as they had been

unfit to be harnessed for days, and had several times been obliged to leave those behind that were emaciated and exhausted.

From the Nagout River we had to go right up to the Olifant's River, a distance of about 20 miles, which took us three days. The track led all along through the immense bush-plain which extends from the high Mauch Mountains in the west to the Lebombo Mountains in the east; and yet one could only see a few paces ahead during all these days, and the only thing we could discern was the summit of some mountain on the westerly or easterly horizon, and even the tops of the Mauch and Lebombo Mountains one could only see by standing on the top of a loaded waggon, and with the aid of a field-glass. This thickly-wooded region included nearly one-third of the Transvaal, and is uninhabited, the white men fearing the unhealthy climate, while only some miserable little kaffir tribes were found about there, the bulk being the undisputed territory of the wild animals.

The Olifant's River, which we had to cross, is over 100 feet wide. The old track leading down to it, was so thickly covered with trees and undergrowth that we had to cut a path through it. The banks of the river were not very high, thus enabling us to make a drift without much trouble. The bed was rocky, and the water pretty shallow, and towards the afternoon the whole commando had crossed. Here again we were obliged to rest our cattle for a few days, during which we had to fulfil the melancholy duty of burying two of our burghers who had died of fever. It was a very sad loss and we were very much affected, especially as one left a young wife and two little children, living at Barberton. The other one was a young colonial Afrikander who had left his parents in the Cradock district (Cape Colony) to fight for our cause. We could not help thinking how intensely sad it was to lose

one's life on the banks of this river, far from one's home, from relatives and friends, without a last grasp of the hand of those who where nearest and dearest.

The Transvaaler's last words were:—

"Be sure to tell my wife I am dying cheerfully, with a clear conscience; that I have given my life for the welfare of my Fatherland."

We had now to leave some draught cattle and horses behind every day, and the number of those who were obliged to walk was continually increasing, till there were several hundred.

Near Sabini, the first river we came to after leaving Leydsdorp we secured twenty-four mules which were of very great use to us under the circumstances. But the difficulty was how to distribute them amongst the field-cornets. The men all said they wanted them very urgently, and at once found the cattle belonging to each cart to be too thin and too weak to move. Yet the twenty-four could only be put into two carts, and I had to solve the difficulty by asserting my authority.

It was no easy task to get over the Agatha Mountains and we had to rest for the day near the big Letaba, especially as we had to give the whole file of carts, guns, etc., a chance of forming up again. Here we succeeded in buying some loads of mealies, which were a real God-send to our half-starved horses. I also managed to hire some teams of oxen from Boers who had taken up a position with their cattle along the Letaba, which enabled us to get our carts out of the Hartbosch Mountains as far as practicable. The task would have been too fatiguing for our cattle. It took us two days before we were out of these mountains, when we camped out on the splendid "plateau" of the Koutboschbergen, where the climate was wholesome and pleasant.

Here, after having passed a whole month in the wilderness of the low veldt, with its destructive climate, it was as

though we began a new life, as if we had come back to civilisation. We again saw white men's dwellings, cultivated green fields, flocks of grazing sheep, and herds of sleek cows.

The inhabitants of the country were not a little surprised, not to say alarmed, to find, early one Sunday morning, a big laager occupying the plateau. A Boer laager always looks twice as large as it really is when seen from a little distance. Some Boer lads presently came up to ask us whether we were friends or enemies, for in these distant parts people were not kept informed of what happened elsewhere.

"A general," said a woman, who paid us a visit in a trap, "is a thing we have all been longing to see. I have called to hear some news, and whether you would like to buy some oats; but I tell you straight I am not going to take "blue-backs" (Government notes), and if you people buy my oats you will have to pay in gold."

A burgher answered her: "There is the General, under that cart; 'tante' had better go to him."

Of course I had heard the whole conversation, but thought the woman had been joking. The good lady came up to my cart, putting her cap a little on one side, probably to favour us with a peep at her beauty.

"Good morning. Where is that General Viljoen; they say he is here?"

I thought to myself: "I wonder what this charming Delilah of fifty summers wants," and got up and shook hands with her, saying: "I am that General. What can I do for 'tante'?"

"No, but I never! Are you the General? You don't look a bit like one; I thought a General looked 'baing' (much) different from what you are like."

Much amused by all this I asked: "What's the matter with me, then, 'tante'?"

"Nay, but cousin (meaning myself) looks like a youngster. I have heard so much of you, I expected to see an old man with a long beard."

I had had enough of this comedy, and not feeling inclined to waste any more civilities on this innocent daughter of Mother Eve, I asked her about the oats.

I sent an adjutant to have a look at her stock and to buy what we wanted, and the prim dame spared me the rest of her criticism.

We now heard that Pietersburg and Warmbad were still held by the Boers, and the road was therefore clear. We marched from here vio Haenertsburg, a little village on the Houtboschbergrand, and the seat of some officials of the Boer Mining Department, for in this neighbourhood gold mines existed, which in time of peace gave employment to hundreds of miners.

Luckily, there was also a hospital at Haenertsburg, where we could leave half a dozen fever patients, under the careful treatment of an Irish doctor named Kavanagh, assisted by the tender care of a daughter of the local justice of the peace, whose name, I am sorry to say, I have forgotten.

About the 19th of October, 1900, we arrived at Pietersburg, our place of destination.

CHAPTER XXIV.

PAINS AND PLEASURES OF COMMANDEERING.

WE found Pietersburg to be quite republican, all the officials, from high to low, in their proper places in the offices, and the "Vierkleur" flying from the Government buildings. The railway to Warmbad was also in Boer hands. At Warmbad were General Beyers and his burghers and those of the Waterberg district. Although we had no coals left, this did not prevent us from running a train with a sufficient number of carriages from Pietersburg to Warmbad twice a week. We used wood instead, this being found in great quantities in this part of the country.

Of course, it took some time to get steam up, and we had to put in more wood all the time, while the boilers continually threatened to run dry. We only had two engines, one of which was mostly up for repairs. The other one served to keep the commandos at Warmbad provided with food, etc.

The Pietersburgers also had kept up telegraphic communication, and we were delighted to hear that clothes and boots could be got in the town, as we had to replace our own, which had got dreadfully torn and worn out on the "trek" through the "boschveldt." Each commandant did his best to get the necessary things together for his burghers, and my quarters were the centre of great activity from the early morning to late in the evening, persons who had had their goods commandeered applying to the General and lodging complaints.

After we had been at Pietersburg for eight days, a

delay which seemed so many months to me, I had really had too much of it. The complaints were generally introduced by remarks about how much the complainants ancestors had done for the country at Boomplaats, Majuba, etc., etc., and how unfairly they were now being treated by having their only horses, or mules, or their carriages, or saddles commandeered.

The worst of it was, that they all had to be coaxed, either with a long sermon, pointing out to them what an honour and distinction it was to be thus selected to do their duty to their country and their people, or by giving them money if no appeal to their generous feelings would avail; sometimes by using strong language to the timid ones, telling them it would have to be, whether they liked it or not.

Anyhow we got a hundred fine horses together at the cost of a good many imprecations. The complainants may be divided into the following categories:—

1st. Those who really believed they had some cause of complaint.

2nd. Those who did not feel inclined to part with anything without receiving the full value in cash—whose patriotism began and ended with money.

3rd. Those who had Anglophile tendencies and thought it an abomination to part with anything to a commando (these were the worst to deal with, for they wore a mask, and we often did not know whether we had got hold of the Evil One's tail or an angel's pinions), and

4th. Those who were complaining without reason. These were, as a rule, burghers who did not care to fight, and who remained at home under all sorts of pretexts.

The complaints from females consisted of three classes:—

1st. The patriotic ones who did all they could—sensible ladies as they were—to help us and to encourage our

burghers, but who wanted the things we had commandeered for their own use.

2nd. The women without any national sympathy—a tiresome species, who forget their sex, and burst into vituperation if they could not get their way; and

3rd. The women with English sympathies, carefully hidden behind a mask of pro-Boer expressions.

The pity of it was that you could not see it written on their foreheads which category they belonged to, and although one could soon find out what their ideas were, one had to be careful in expressing a decided opinion about them, as there was a risk of being prosecuted for libel.

I myself always preferred an outspoken complaint. I could always cut up roughly refer him to martial law, and gruffly answer, "It will have to be like this, or you will have to do it!" And if that did not satisfy him I had him sent away. But the most difficult case was when the complaint was stammered under a copious flood of tears, although not supported by any arguments worth listening to.

There were a good many foreign subjects at Pietersburg but they were mostly British, and these persons, who also had some of their horses, etc., commandeered, were a great source of trouble, for many Boer officers and burghers treated them without any ceremony, simply taking away what they wanted for their commandos. I did not at all agree with this way of doing things, for so long as a foreign subject, though an Englishman, is allowed to remain within the fighting lines, he has a right to protection and fairness, and no difference ought to be made between him and the burghers who stay at home, when there is any fighting to be done.

From Pietersburg we went to Nylstroom, a village on the railway to wich I had been summoned by telegram by the Commandant-General, who had arrived there on

his way to the westerly districts, this being the first I had heard of him after we had parted at the foot of the Mauchberg, near Mac Mac.

I travelled by rail, accompanied by one of my commandants. The way they managed to keep up steam was delightfully primitive. We did not, indeed, fly along the rails, yet we very often went at the rate of nine miles an hour.

When our supply of wood got exhausted, we would just stop the train, or the train would stop itself, and the passengers were politely requested to get out and take a hand at cutting down trees and carrying wood. This had a delicious flavour of the old time stage coach about it, when first, second, and third class passengers travelled in the same compartment, although the prices of the different classes varied considerably. When a coach came to the foot of a mountain the travellers would, however, soon find out where the difference between the classes lay, for the driver would order all firstclass passengers to keep their seats, secondclass passengers to get out and walk, and third-class passengers to get out and push.

We got to our destination, however, although the chances seemed to have been against it. I myself had laid any odds against ever arriving alive.

At Nylstroom we found President Steyn and suite, who had just arrived, causing a great stir in this sleepy little village, which had now become a frontier village of the territory in which we still held sway.

A great popular meeting was held, which President Steyn opened with a manly speech, followed by a no less stirring one from our Commandant-General, both exhorting the burghers to do their duty towards their country and towards themselves by remaining faithful to the Cause, as the very existence of our nation depended on it.

In the afternoon the officers met in an empty hall of

the hotel at Nylstroom to hold a Council of War, under the direction of the Commandant-General.

Plans were discussed and arrangements made for the future. I was to march at once from Pietersburg to the north-westerly part of the Pretoria district, and on to Witnek, which would bring us back to our old battlegrounds. The state of the commandos, I was told, in those parts was very sad. The commandant of the Boksburg Commando had mysteriously fallen into the enemy's hands, and with his treacherous assistance nearly the whole commando had been captured as well. The Pretoria Commando had nearly shared this melancholy fate.

That same night we travelled to Pietersburg. After we had passed Yzerberg the train seemed to be going more and more slowly, till we came to a dead stop. The engine had broken down, and all we could do was to get out and walk the rest of the way. In a few hours' time, to our great joy, the second, and the only other train from Pietersburg there was, came up.

After having convinced the engine-driver that he had to obey the General's orders, he complied with our request to take us to Pietersburg, and at last, after a lot of trouble, we arrived the following day. Our cattle and horses were now sufficiently rested and in good condition. The commandos have been provided with the things they most urgently needed, and ordered to be ready within two days.

CHAPTER XXV.

PUNISHING THE PRO-BRITISH.

DURING the first days of November, 1900, we went from Pietersburg to Witnek, about nineteen miles north of Bronkhorst Spruit, in the Pretoria district. We had enjoyed a fortnight's rest, which had especially benefited our horses, and our circumstances were much more favourable in every respect when we left Pietersburg than when we had entered it.

The Krugersdorp Commando had been sent to its own district, from Pietersburg via Warmbad and Rustenburg, under Commandant Jan Kemp, in order to be placed under General De la Rey's command. Most of the burghers preferred being always in their own districts, even though the villages scattered about were in the enemy's hands, the greater part of the homesteads burnt down and the farms destroyed, and nearly all the families had been placed in British Concentration Camps; and if the commanding officers would not allow the burghers to go to their own districts they would simply desert, one after the other, to join the commando nearest their districts.

I do not think there is another nation so fondly attached to their home and its neighbourhood, even though the houses be in ruins an the farms destroyed. Still the Boer feels attracted to it, and when he has at last succeeded in reaching it, you will often find him sit down disconsolately among the ruins or wandering about in the vicinity.

It was better, therefore, to keep our men somewhere near their districts, for even from a strategical point of

view they were better there, knowing every nook and cranny, which enabled them to find exactly where to hide in case of danger. Even in the dark they were able to tell, after scouting, which way the enemy would be coming. This especially gave a commando the necessary self-reliance, which is of such great importance in battle. It has also been found during the latter part of the War to be easier for a burgher to get provisions in his own district than in others, notwithstanding the destruction caused by the enemy.

Commandant Muller, of the Boksburg Commando, one of those who were lucky enough to escape the danger of being caught through the half-heartedness of the previous commandant (Dirksen), and had taken his place, arrived at Warmbad almost the same moment. He proceeded via Yzerberg and joined us at Klipplaatdrift near Zebedelestad.

I had allowed a field-cornet's company, consisting of Colonial Afrikanders, to accompany President Steyn to the Orange Free State, which meant a reduction of my force of 350 men, including the Krugersdorpers. But the junction with the Boksburg burghers, numbering about 200 men, somewhat made up for it.

We went along the Olifant's River, by Israelskop and Crocodile Hill, to the spot where the Eland's River runs into the Olifant's River, and thence direct to Witnek through Giftspruit.

The grass, after the heavy rains, was in good condition and yielded plenty of food for our quadrupeds. Strange to say, nothing worth recording occurred during this "trek" of about 95 miles. About the middle of November we camped near the "Albert" silver mines, south of Witnek.

Commandant Erasmus was still in this part of the country with the remainder of the Pretoria Commando. Divided into three or four smaller groups, they watched in the neighbourhood of the railway, from Donkerhoek till close to Wilger River Station,

and whenever the enemy moved out, the men on watch gave warning and all fled with their families and cattle into the "boschveldt" along Witnek.

It was these tactics which enabled the British Press to state that the Generals Plumer and Paget had a brilliant victory over Erasmus the previous month; for, with the exception of a few abandoned carts at Zusterhoek, they could certainly not have seen anything of Erasmus and his commando except a cloud of dust on the road from Witnek to the "boschveldt."

I had instructions to reorganise the commandos in these regions and to see that law and order were maintained. The reorganisation was a difficult work, for the burghers were divided amongst themselves.

Some wanted a different commando, while others wanted to keep to Erasmus, who was formerly general and who had been my superior, round Ladysmith. He, one of the wealthiest and most influential burghers in the Pretoria district, did not seem inclined to carry out my instructions, and altogether he could not get accustomed to the altered conditions. I did all I could in the matter, but, so far as the Pretoria Commando was concerned, the result of my efforts was not very satisfactory. Nor did the generals who tried the same thing after me get on with the re-organisation while Erasmus remained in control as an officer. A dangerous element, which he and his clique tolerated, was formed by some families (Schalkwyk and others) who, after having surrendered to the enemy, were allowed to remain on their holdings, with their cattle, and to go on farming as if nothing had happened. They generally lived near the railway between our sentry stations and those of the enemy. These "voluntarily disarmed ones," as we called them, had got passes from the enemy, allowing them free access to the British camps, and in accordance with one of Lord Roberts' proclamations, their

duty, on seeing any Boers or commandos, was, to notify this at once to the nearest English picket, and also to communicate all information received about the Boers. All this was on penalty of having their houses burnt down and their cattle and property confiscated. Sometimes a brother or orther relative of these "hands-uppers" would call on them. The son of one of them was adjutant to Commandant Erasmus, and shared his tent with him, while the adjutant often visited his parents during the night and sometimes by day; the consequence being that the English always knew exactly what was going on in our district. This situation could not be allowed to go on, and I instructed one of my officers to have all these suspected families placed behind our commandos. Any male persons who had surrendered to the enemy out of cowardice were arrested.

Most of them were court-martialled for high treason and desertion, and giving up their arms, and fifteen were imprisoned in a school building at Rhenosterkop, which had been turned into a gaol for the purpose. The court consisted of a presiding officer selected from the commandants by the General, and of four members, two of whom had been chosen by the General and the President, and two by the burghers.

In the absence of our "Staats-procureur," a lawyer was appointed public prosecutor.

Before the trial commenced the President was sworn by the General and the other four members by the President. The usual criminal procedure was followed, and each sentence was submitted for the General's ratification.

The court could decree capital punishment, in which case there could be an appeal to the Government.

There were other courts, constituted by the latter, but as they were moving about almost every day, they were not always available, and recourse had then to be taken to the court-martial.

The fifteen prisoners were tried in Rhenosterkop churchyard. The trial lasted several days, and I do not remenber all the particulars of the various sentences, which differed from two and a half to five years' imprisonment, I believe with the option of a fine. The only prison we could send them to was at Pietersburg, and there they went.

The arresting and punishing of these people caused a great sensation in the different commandos.

It seems incredible, but it is a fact that many members of these traitors' families were very indignant about my action in the matter, even sending me anonymous letters in which they threatened to shoot me.

Although there was less treason after the conviction of these fifteen worthies had taken place, there always remained an easy channel in the shape of correspondence between burghers from the commandos and their relatives within the English fighting lines, carried by kaffir runners. This could not be stopped so easily.

On the 19th of November, 1900, I attacked the enemy on the railway simultaneously at Balmoral and Wilgeriver, and soon found that the British had heard of our plan beforehand.

Commandant Muller, who was cautiously creeping up to the enemy at Wilgeriver with some of his burghers, and a Krupp gun, met with a determined resistance early in the morning. He succeeded, indeed, in taking a few small forts, but the station was too strongly fortified, and the enemy used two 15-pounders in one of the forts with such precision as to soon hit our Krupp gun, which had to be cleared out of the fighting line.

The burghers, who had taken the small forts in the early morning, were obliged to stop there till they could get away under protection of the darkness, with three men wounded. We did not find out the enemy's losses.

We were equally unfortunate near Balmoral Station, where I personally led the attack.

At daybreak I ordered a fortress to be stormed, expecting to capture a gun, which would enable us to fire on the station from there, and then storm it. In fact we occupied the fort with little trouble, taking a captain and 32 men prisoners, besides inflicting a loss of several killed and wounded, while a score or more escaped. These all belonged to the "Buffs," the same regiment which now takes part in watching us at St. Helena. But, on the whole, we were disappointed, not finding a gun in the fort, which was situated to the west of the station. Two divisions of burghers with a 15-pounder and a pom-pom were approaching the station from north to east, while a commando, under Field-Cornet Duvenhage, which had been called upon to strengthen the attack, was to occupy an important position in the south before the enemy could take it up, for during the night it was still unoccupied.

Our 15-pounder, one of the guns we had captured from the English, fired six shells on the enemy at the station, when it burst, while the pom-pom after having sent some bombs through the station buildings, also jammed. We tried to storm over the bare ground between our position and the strongly barricaded and fortified station, and the enemy would no doubt have been forced to surrender if they had not realized that something had gone wrong with us, our guns being silent, and Field-Cornet Duvenhage and his burghers not turning up from the south. The British, who had taken an important position from which they could cover us with their fire, sent us some lyddite shells from a howitzer in the station fort. Although there was a good shower of them, yet the lyddite-squirt sent the shells at such a slow pace, that we could quietly watch them coming and get under cover in time and therefore they did very little harm.

At eight o'clock we were forced to fall back, for although we had destroyed the railway and telegraphic communications

in several places over night, the latter were repaired in the afternoon, and the enemy's reinforcements poured in from Pretoria as well as from Middelburg. I observed all this through my glass from the position I had taken up on a high point near the Douglas coal mines.

Amongst the prisoners we had made in the morning was a captain of the "Buffs," whose collar stars had been stripped off for some reason, the marks showing they had only recently been removed. At that time there were no orders to keep officers as prisoners-of-war, and this captain was therefore sent back to Balmoral with the other "Tommies," after we had relieved them of their weapons and other things which we were in want of. I read afterwards, in an English newspaper, that this captain had taken the stars off in order to save himself from the "cruelties of the Boers."

This, I considered, an unjust and undeserved libel.

CHAPTER XXVI.

BATTLE OF RHENOSTERKOP.

ON the 27th of November, 1900, our scouts reported that a force of the enemy was marching from the direction of Pretoria, and proceeding along Zustershoek. I sent out Commandant Muller with a strong patrol, while I placed the laager in a safe position, in the ridge of kopjes running from Rhenosterkop some miles to the north. This is the place, about 15 miles to the northeast of Bronkhorst Spruit, where Colonel Anstruther with the 94th regiment was attacked in 1881 by the Boers and thoroughly defeated. Rhenosterkop is a splendid position, rising several hundred feet above the neighbouring heights, and can be seen from a great distance. Towards the south and south-east this kopje is cut off from the Kliprandts (known by the name of Suikerboschplaats) by a deep circular cleft called Rhenosterpoort.

On the opposite side of this cleft the so-called "banks" form a "plateau" about the same height as the Rhenosterkop, with some smaller plateaux, at a lesser altitude, towards the Wilge River. These plateaux form a crescent running from south-east to north of the Rhenosterkop. Only one road leading out of the "bank", near Blackwood Camp and crossing them near Goun, gives access to this crescent. On the west side is a great gap up to Zustershoek, only interrupted by some "randjes," or ridges, near the Albert silver mines and the row of kopjes on which I had now taken up a position.

The enemy's force had been estimated at 5,000 men,

mostly mounted, who, quite against their usual tactics, charged us so soon as they noticed us. Muller had to fall back again and again. The enemy under General Paget, pursued us as if we were a lot of game, and it soon became apparent that they had made up their minds to catch us this time. I sent our carts into the forest along Poortjesnek to Roodelaager, and made a stand in the kopjes near Rhenosterkop.

On the 28th—the next day—General Paget pitched his camp near our positions, shelling us with some batteries of field guns till dusk. The same evening I received information that a force under General Lyttelton had marched from Middelburg and arrived near Blackwood Camp. This meant that our way near Gourjsberg had been cut off. All we could do was to keep the road along Poortjesnek well defended, for if the enemy were to succeed in blocking that as well, we would be in a trap and be entirely cut up.

There was General Paget against us to the west, to the south there was Rhenosterkop with no way out, and General Lyttelton to the east, while to the north there was only one road, running between high chains and deep clefts. If General Paget were to make a flanking movement threatening the road to the north, I should have been obliged to retire in hot haste, but we were in hopes the General would not think of this. General Lyttelton only needed to advance another mile, right up to the first "randts" of the mountain near Blackwood Camp, for his guns to command our whole position, and to make it impossible for us to hold it. I had, however, a field-cornet's company between him and my burghers, with instructions to resist as long as possible, and to prevent our being attacked from behind, which plan succeeded, as luck would have it. My Krupp and pom-pom guns had been repaired, or rather, patched up, though the

former had only been fired fourteen times when it was done up.

I placed the Johannesburgers on the left, the Police in the centre, and the Boksburgers on the right. As I have already pointed out, these positions were situated in a row of small kopjes strewn with big "klips," while the assailant would have to charge over a bare "bult," and we should not be able to see each other before they were at 60 to 150 paces distant.

Next morning, when the day dawned, the watchmen gave the alarm, the warning we knew so well, "The Khakis are coming!" The horses were all put out of range of the bullets behind the "randts." I rode about with my officers in front of our positions, thus being able to overlook the whole ground, just at daybreak.

It gave me a turn when I suddenly saw the gigantic army of "Khakis" right in front of us, slowly approaching, in grand formation, regiment upon regiment, deploying systematically, in proper fighting order, and my anxiety was mingled with admiration at the splendid discipline of the adversary. This, then, was the first act in the bloody drama which would be played for the next fifteen hours. The enemy came straight up to us, and had obviously been carefully reconnoitring our positions.

General Paget seemed to have been spoiling for a fight, for it did not look as if he simply meant to threaten our only outlet. His heavy ordnance was in position near his camp, behind the soldiers, and was firing at us over their heads, while some 15-pounders were divided amongst the different regiments. The thought of being involved in such an unequal struggle weighed heavily on my mind. Facing me were from four to five thousand soldiers, well equipped, well disciplined, backed up by a strong artillery; just behind me my men, 500 at the outside, with some patched-up guns, almost too shaky for firing purposes.

But I could rely on at least 90 per cent. of my burghers being splendid shots, each man knowing how to economise his store of ammunition, while their hearts beat warmly for the Cause.

The battle was opened by our Krupp gun, from which they had orders to fire the fourteen shells we had at our disposal, and then "run." The enemy's heavy guns soon answered from the second ridge. When it was broad daylight the enemy tried his first charge on the Johannesburg position, over which my brother had the command, and approached in skirmishing order. They charged right up to seventy paces, when our men fired for the first time, so that we could not very well have missed our aim at so short a distance, in addition to which the assailants' outline was just showing against the sky-line over the last ridge. Only two volleys and all the Khakis were flat on the ground, some dead, others wounded, while those who had not been hit were obliged to lie down as flat as a pancake.

The enemy's field-pieces were out of our sight behind the ridge which the enemy had to pass in charging, and they went on firing without any intermission. Half an hour later the position of the Johannesburg Police, under the late Lieutenant D. Smith, was stormed again, this time the British being assisted by two field-pieces which they had brought up with them in the ranks and which were to be used as soon as the soldiers were under fire. They came to within a hundred paces; one of these guns I saw put up, but before they could get the range it had to be removed into safety, for the attacking soldiers fared equally badly here as on our left flank.

Then after a little hesitation, they tried the attack on our right flank again, when Commandant Muller and the Boksburgers and some Pretoria burghers, under Field-Cornet Opperman held the position, but with the same

fatal result to the attackers. Our fifteen-pounder, after having been fired a few times, had given out, while our pom-pom could only be used from time to time after the artilleryman had righted it.

I had a heliograph post near the left-hand position, one near the centre and the one belonging to my staff on our extreme right. I remained near this, expecting a flank movement by General Paget after his front attacks had failed. From this coign of vantage I was able to overlook the whole of the fighting ground, besides which I was in constant touch with my officers, and could tell them all the enemy's movements.

About 10 o'clock they charged again, and so far as I could see with a fresh regiment. We allowed them to come up very closely again and once more our deadly Mauser fire mowed them down, compelling those who went scot-free to go down flat on the ground; while during this charge some who had been obliged to drop down, now jumped up and ran away. If I remember rightly, it was during this charge that a brave officer, who had one of his legs smashed, leant on a gun or his sword, and kept on giving his orders, cheering the soldiers and telling them to charge on. While in this position, a second bullet struck him, and he fell mortally wounded. We afterwards heard it was a certain Colonel Lloyd of the West Riding Regiment. A few months after, on passing over this same battle-field, we laid a wreath of flowers on his grave, with a card, bearing the inscription: "In honour of a brave enemy."

General Paget seemed resolved to take our positions, whatever the sacrifice of human lives might be. If he succeeded at last, he might find half a score of wounded burghers and if his cavalry hurried up, perhaps a number of burghers with horses in bad condition, but nothing more.

Whereas, if he had made a flanking movement, he might have attained his end, perhaps without losing a single man.

Pride or stupidity must have induced him not to change his tactics. Nothing daunted by the repeated failures in the morning, our assailant charged again, now one position and then another, trying to get their field-pieces in position, but each time without success. At their wits' end, the enemy tried another dodge, bringing his guns right up to our position under cover of some Red Cross waggons. The officer who perceived this, reported to me by heliograph, asking for instructions. I answered: 'If a Red Cross waggon enters the fighting lines during the battle, it is there on its own responsibility.' Besides, General Paget, under protection of the white flag, might have asked any moment for an hour, or longer, to carry away his many unfortunate wounded, who were lying between two fires in the burning sun.

When the Red Cross waggon was found to be in the line of fire, it was put right-about face, while some guns remained behind to fire shrapnel at us from a short distance. They could only fire one or two shots, for our burghers soon put out of action the artilleryists who were serving them. Towards the afternoon some of my burghers began to run short of ammunition. I had a field-cornet's force in reserve, from which five to ten men were sent to the position from time to time, and this cheered the burghers up again.

The same attacking tactics were persisted in by General Paget all day long, although they were a complete failure. When the sun disappeared behind the Magaliesbergs, the enemy made a final, in fact, a desperate effort to take our positions, the guns booming along while we were enveloped by clouds of dust thrown up by the shells.

The soldiers charged, brave as lions, and crept closer to our positions than they had done during the day.

But it seemed as if Fate were favouring us, for our 15-pounder had just got ready, sending his shells into the enemy's lines in rapid succession, and finding the range most beautifully. The pom-pom too— which we could only get to firo one or two shells all day long, owing to the gunner having to potter about for two or three hours after each shot to try and repair it— to our great surprise suddenly commenced booming away, and the two pieces—I was going to say the "mysterious" pieces—poured a stream of murderous steel into the assailants, which made them waver and then retire, leaving many comrades behind.

On our side only two burghers were killed, while 22 were wounded. The exact loss of the enemy was difficult to estimate. It must, however, have amounted to some hundreds.

Again night spread a dark veil over one of the most bloody dramas of this war. After the cessation of hostilities, I called my officers together and considered our position. We had not lost an inch of ground that day, while the enemy had gained nothing. On the contrary, they had suffered a serious repulse at our hands. But our ammunition was getting scarce, our waggons, with provisions, were 18 miles away. All we had in our positions was mealies and raw meat, and the burghers had no chance of cooking them. We therefore decided, as we had no particular interest in keeping these positions, to fall back that night on Poortjesnek, which was a "half-way house" between the place we were leaving and our carts, from which we should be able to draw our provisions and reserve ammunition.

We therefore allowed General Paget to occupy these positions without more ado.

I have tried to describe this battle as minutely as possible in order to show that incompetence of generals was not always on our side only.

I have seen from the report of the British Commander-

in-Chief, published in the newspapers, that this battle had been a most successful and brilliant victory, gained by General Paget. People will say, perhaps, that it was silly on my part to evacuate the positions, and that I should have gone on defending them the next day. Well, in the old days this would have been done by European generals, but no doubt they were fighting under different circumstances. They were not faced by a force ten times their own strength; not restricted to a limited quantity of ammunition; nor were they in want of proper food or reinforcements. The nearest Boer commando was at Warmbad, about 60 miles distant. Besides, there was no necessity, either for military or strategical reasons, for us to cling to these positions. It had already become our policy to fight whenever we could, and to retire when we could not hold on any longer. The Government had decided that the War should be continued and it was the duty of every general to manœuvre so as to prolong it. We had no reserve troops, so my motto was: "Kill as many of the enemy as you possibly can, but see you do not expose your own men, for we cannot spare a single one."

On the 30th of November, the day after the fight, I was with a patrol on the first "randts," north-east of Rhenosterkop, just as the sun rose, and had a splendid view of the whole battlefield of the previous day. I saw the enemy's scouts, cautiously approaching the evacuated positions, and concluded from the precautions they were taking that they did not know we had left overnight. Indeed, very shortly after I saw the Khakis storming and occupying the kopjes. How great must have been their astonishment and disappointment on finding those positions deserted, for the possession of which they had shed so much blood. A number of ambulance waggons were brought up and were moving backwards and forwards on the battlefield, taking the wounded to the hospital camp, which must have

assumed colossal proportions. Ditches were seen to be dug, in which the killed soldiers were buried. A troop of kaffirs carried the bodies, as far as I could distinguish, and I could distinctly see some heaps of khaki-coloured forms near the graves.

As the battlefield looked now, it was a sad spectacle. Death and mutilation, sorrow and misery, were the traces yesterday's fight had left behind. How sad, I thought, that civilised nations should thus try to annihilate one another. The repeated brave charges made by General Paget's soldiers, notwithstanding our deadly fire, had won our greatest admiration for the enemy, and many a burgher sighed even during the battle. What a pity such plucky fellows should have to be led on to destruction like so many sheep to the butcher's block.

Meanwhile, General Lyttelton's columns had not got any nearer, and it appeared to us that he had only made a display to confuse us, and with the object of inducing us to flee in face of their overwhelming strength.

On the 1st of December General Paget sent a strong mounted force to meet us, and we had a short, sharp fight, without very great loss on either side.

This column camped at Langkloof, near our positions, compelling us to graze and water our horses at the bottom of the "neck" in the woods, where horse-sickness was prevalent. We were, therefore, very soon obliged to move.

About this time I received a report to the effect that a number of women and children were wandering about near Rhenosterkop along the Wilge River. Their houses had been burnt by order of General Paget, and we were asked to protect these unfortunate people.

Some burghers offered to ride out at night time to try and find them, and the next morning they brought several families into our camp. The husbands of these poor sufferers were on duty in the neighbourhood, so that

they were now enabled to do the needful for their wives and children. I put some questions to some of the women, from which it appeared that although they had besought the English not to burn their clothes and food, yet this had been done. Some Australians and Canadians, who had been present, had done their best to save some of the food and clothes, and these Colonials had shown them much consideration in every respect, but, the women added, a gang of kaffirs, who were ordered to cause this destruction, were behaving in the most barbarous and cruel manner, and were under no control by the British soldiers.

I felt bound to protest against these scandalous acts of vandalism, and sent two of my adjutants to the English camp next day with a note of about the following tenour:—

"To General Paget, *commanding H.M's forces at Rhenosterkop.*

"It is my painful duty to bring under your Honour's notice the cruel way in which the troops under your command are acting in ill-treating defenceless women and children. Not only their homes, but also their food and clothes, are being burnt. These poor creatures were left in the open veldt, at the mercy of the kaffirs, and would have died of starvation and exhaustion but for our assistance. This way of treating these unfortunate people is undoubtedly against the rules of civilised warfare, and I beg to emphasise that the responsibility for this cruelty will be entirely yours. You may rest assured that a similar treatment of our families will not shorten the duration of the War, but that, on the contrary, such barbarities will force the burghers to prolong the struggle and to fight on with more bitterness and determination than ever."

The two despatch carriers whom I sent to the British General under a white flag were taken for spies, and however much they tried to establish their identity, General Paget was not to be convinced, and had them arrested, detaining them for three days. Their horses were used every day by the English officers, which I consider far from gentlemanly. On the third day my two adjutants were again taken before the general, and cross-examined, but no evidence could be found against their being bona-fide messengers. Paget told them that my despatch was all

nonsense, and did not give them the right to enter his lines under the white flag, adding, while he handed them a letter addressed to me. "You can go now; tell your General that if he likes to fight I shall be pleased to meet him at any time in the open. You have killed some of my Red Cross people, but I know it was done by those 'damned' unscrupulous Johannesburgers. Tell them I shall pay them for this."

Before my adjutants left, a certain Captain———— said to one of them:

"I say, what do your people think of the fight?"

"Which fight do you mean?" asked the adjutant.

"The fight here," returned the captain.

"Oh," remarked the adjutant, "we think it was rather a mismanagement." To which the captain replied: "By Jove! you are not the only people who think so."

The contents of General Paget's letter were short and rough; "The responsibility for the suffering of women and children rests on the shoulders of those who blindly continue the helpless struggle," etc., etc.,

I may say here that this was the first time in this War the English officers treated my despatch riders under the white flag in such a manner, giving me at the same time such a discourteous answer.

No doubt we have had generals acting like this on our side, and I admit that we did not always stand on etiquette.

As already stated, part of the enemy's forces were camping our near Poortjesnek, so close by that we had to shift our laager and commando to a more healthy part on account of the horsesickness. The enemy installed a permanent occupation at Rhenosterkop, and we moved into the Lydenberg district, where we knew we should find some wholesome "veldt" on the Steenkamps Mauntains. We went through the forest near Maleemskop via Roodekraal, to the foot of Bothasberg, where we had a few weeks' rest.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SECOND CHRISTMAS AT WAR.

THE veldt was in splendid condition at the foot of Bothasberg, where we had pitched our camp. We found mealies and cattle left everywhere. The enemy did not know where we really were, and could not, therefore, bother us for the time being. Our Government was at Tautesberg, about 12 miles north of Bothasberg, and we received a visit from Acting-President Burger, who brought with him the latest news from Europe, and the reports from the other commandos. Mr. Burger said he was sorry we had to leave the Pretoria district, but he could understand our horses would have all been killed by the sickness if we had stopped at Poortjesnek. As regards the Battle of Rhenosterkop, he expressed the Government's satisfaction with the result.

On the 16th of December we celebrated Dingaan's Day in a solemn manner. Pastor J. Louw, who had faithfully accompanied us during these fatiguing months of retreats and adversity, delivered a most inpressive address, describing our position. Several officers also spoke, and I myself had a go at it, although I kept to politics. In the afternoon the burghers had sports, consisting of races on foot and on horseback. The prizes were got together by means of small contributions from the officers. All went well, without any mishaps, and it was unanimously voted to have been very entertaining.

It was a peculair sight—taking into consideration the circumstances—to see these people on the "veldt" feasting

and of good cheer, each trying to amuse the other, under the fluttering "Vierkleur"—the only one we possessed—but the look of which gladdened the hearts of many assisting at this celebration in the wilderness. How could we have been in a truly festive mood without the sight of that beloved banner, which it had cost so many sacrifices to protect, and to save which so much Afrikander blood had been shed.

And in many of us the thought suggested itself: "O, Vierkleur of our Transvaal, how much longer shall we be allowed to see you unfurled? How long, O Lord, will a stream of tears and blood have to flow before we are again the undisputed masters of our little Republic, scarcely visible on the world's map? For how long will our adored Vierkleur be allowed to remain floating over the heads of our persecuted nation, whose blood has stained and soaked your colours for some generations? We hope and trust that so sure as the sun shall rise in the east and set in the west, so surely may this our flag, now wrapped in sorry mourning, soon flutter aloft again in all its glory, over the country on which Nature lavishes her most wondrous treasures."

The Afrikander character may be called peculiar in many respects. In moments of reverse, when the future seems dark, one can easily trace its pessimistic tendencies. But once his comrades buried, the wounded attended to, and a moment's rest left him by the enemy, the cheerful part of the Boer nature prevails, and he is full of fun and sport. If anybody, in a sermon or in a speech, try to impress on him the seriousness of the situation, pointing out how our ancestors have suffered and how we have to follow in their steps, our hero of yesterday, the jolly lad who was laughing boisterously and joking a minute ago, is seen to melt, and the tears start in his eyes. I am now referring to the true Afrikander. Of course, there are many

calling themselves Afrikanders who during this War have proved themselves to be the scum of the nation. I wish to keep them distinguished from the true, from the noble men belonging to this nationality of whom I shall be proud as long as I live, no matter what the result of the War may be.

Our laagers were not in a very satisfactory position, more as regards our safety than the question, of health, sickness being expected to make itself felt only later in the year.

We therefore decided to "trek" another 10 miles, to the east of Witpoort, through Korfsnek, to the Steenkampsbergen, in order to pitch or camp at Windhoek. Windhoek (windcorner) was an appropriate name, the breezes blowing there at times with unrelenting fury.

Here we celebrated Christmas of 1900, but we sorely missed the many presents our friends and lady acquaintances sent us from Johannesburg on the previous festival, and which had made last year's Christmas on the Tugela such a success.

No flour, sugar or coffee, no spirits or cigars to brighten up our festive board. This sort of thing belonged to the luxuries which had long ceased to come our way, and we had to look pleasant on mealie-porridge and meat, varied by meat and mealie-porridge.

Yet many groups of burghers were seen to be amusing themselves at all sorts of games; or you found a pastor leading divine service and exhorting the burghers. Thus we kept our second Christmas in the field.

About this time the commandos from the Lydenburg district (where we now were) as well as those from the northern part of Middelburg, were placed under my command, and I was occupied for several days in reorganising the new arrivals. The fact of the railway being almost incessantly in the hands of the enemy, and the road from

Machadodorp to Lydenburg also blocked by them (the latter being occupied in several places by large or small garrisons) compelled us to place a great number of outposts to guard against continual attacks and to report whenever some of the columns, which were always moving about, were approaching.

The spot where our laagers were now situated was only 13 miles from Belfast and Bergendal, between which two places General Smith-Dorrien's strong force was posted; while a little distance behind Lydenburg was General Walter Kitchener with an equally strong garrison. We were, therefore, obliged to be continually on the alert, not relaxing our watchfulness for one single moment. One or two burghers were still deserting from time to time, aggravating their shameful behaviour by informing the enemy of our movements, which often caused a well-arranged plan to fail. We knew this was simply owing to these very dangerous traitors.

The State Artillerymen, who had now been deprived of their guns, were transformed into a mounted corps of 85 men, under Majors Wolmarans and Pretorius, and placed under my command for the time being.

It was now time we should assume the offensive, before the enemy attacked us. I therefore went out scouting for some days, with several of my officers, in order to ascertain the enemy's positions and to find out their weakest spot. My task was getting too arduous, and I decided to promote Commandant Muller to the rank of a fighting-general. He turned ont to be an active and reliable assistant.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CAPTURE OF "LADY ROBERTS."

AFTER I had carefully reconnoitred the enemy's positions, I resolved, after consulting my fighting-general Muller, to attack the Helvetia garrison, one of the enemy's fortifications or camps between Lydenburg and Machadodorp. Those fortifications served to protect the railway road from Machadodorp Station to Lydenburg, along which their convoys went twice a week to provision Lydenburg village. Helvetia is situated three miles east of Machadodorp, four miles west of Watervalboven Station, where a garrison was stationed, and about three miles south of a camp near Zwartkoppies. It was only protected on the north side. Although it was difficult to approach this side on account of a mountainous rand through which the Crocodile River runs, yet this was the only road to take. It led across Witrand or Bakenkop; the commandos were therefore obliged to follow it, and had to do this at night time, for if they had passed the Bakenkop by day they would have exposed themselves to the enemy's artillery fire from the Machadodorp and Zwartkoppies garrisons.

During the night of the 28th of December 1900, we marched from Windhoek, past Dullstroom, up to the neighbourhood of Bakenkop, where we halted and divided the commandos for the attack, which was to be made in about the following order:—

Fighting-General Muller was to trek with 150 men along the convoy-road between Helvetia and Zwartkoppies up to Watervalboven, keeping his movements concealed from

the adversary. Commandant W. Viljoen (my brother), would approach the northerly and southerly parts of Helvetia within a few hundred paces, with part of the Johannesburgers and Johannesburg Police. This commando numbered 200 men.

In order to be able to storm the different forts almost simultaneously we were all to move at 3.30 a.m., and I gave the men a password, in order to prevent confusion and the possibility of our hitting one another in the general charge. There being several forts and trenches to take, the burghers were to shout "Hurrah!" as loudly as they could in taking each fort, which would show us it was captured, and at the same time encourage the others. Two of our most valiant field-cornets, P. Myburgh and J. Cevonia, an Italian Afrikander, were sent to the left, past Helvetia, with 120 men, to attack Zwartkoppies the moment we were to storm Helvetia, while I kept in reserve the State Artillerists and a field-cornet's posse of Lydenburgers to the right of the latter place, near Machadodorp, which would enable me to stop any reinforcements sent to the other side from that place or from Belfast. For if the British were to send any cavalry from there they would be able to turn our rear, and by marching up as soon as they heard the first report of firing at Helvetia, they would be in a position to cut me up with the whole of my commando. I only suggest the possibility of it, and cannot make out why it was not attempted. I can only be thankful to the British officers for omitting to do this.

I had taken up a position, with some of my adjutants, between the commandos as arranged, and stood waiting, watch in hand, for the moment the first shot should be fired. My men all knew their places and their duties, but unfortunately a heavy fog rose at about 2 o'clock, which made the two field-cornets who were to attack the Zwartkoppies lose their way and the chance of reaching their destination before daybreak.

I received the news of this failure at 3.20, *i.e.*, ten minutes before the appointed time of action. A bad beginning, I thought, and these last ten minutes seemed many hours to me.

I struck a match every moment, under cover of my macintosh, to see if it were yet half past three. Another minute and it would soon be decided whether I should be the vanquished or the victor. How many burghers, who were now marching so eagerly to charge the enemy in his trenches, would be missed from our ranks to-morrow? It is such moments of tension which make an officer's hair turn grey. The relation between our burgher and his officers is so entirely different from that which exists between the British officer and his men or between these ranks perhaps in any other standing army. We are all friends; the life of each individual burgher in our army is highly valued by his officer and is only sacrificed at the very highest price. We regret the loss of a simple burgher as much as that of the highest in rank. And it was the distress and worry of seeing these lives lost, which made me ponder before the battle.

Suddenly one of my adjutants called out: "I hear some shouting. What may this be?"

I threw my waterproof over my head and struck a match, then cried: "It is time, my lads!" And in a few seconds a chain of fire flamed up round the forts, immediately followed by the rattling and crackling of the burghers' Mausers. The enemy was not slow in returning our fire.

It is not easy to adequately render the impression a battle in the dark makes. Each time a shot is fired you see a flash of fire several yards long, and where about 500 or 600 rifles are being fired at a short distance from you, it makes one think of a gigantic display of fireworks.

Although it was still dusk, I could easily follow the course of the fight. The defenders firing slackened in

several places, to subside entirely in others, while from the direction of the other reports and flashes, our men were obviously closing up, drawing tighter the ring round the enemy.

So far, according to my scouts, no stir had been made from Belfast, which encouraged me to inform the officers that we were not being cut off. At daybreak only a few shots were falling, and when the fog cleared up I found Helvetia to be in our hands.

General Muller reported that his part of the attack had been successfully accomplished, and that a 4.7 naval gun had been found in the great fortress. I gave orders to fetch this gun out of the fort without delay, to take away the prisoners we had made and as much of the commissariat as we could manage to carry, and to burn the remainder.

Towards the evening we were fired at by two guns at Zwartkoppies, making it very difficult for us to get the provisions away.

A great quantity of rum and other spirits was found among the enemy's commissariat, and as soon as the British soldiers made prisoners were disarmed, they ran up to it, filled their flasks, and drank so freely that about thirty of them were soon unable to walk. Their bad example was followed by several burghers, and many a man who had not been given to drinking used this opportunity to imbibe a good quantity, making it very difficult for us to keep things in order.

About 60 men of the garrison had been killed or wounded, and their commanding officer had received some injuries, but fortunately there was a doctor there who at once attended to these cases. On our side we had five men killed and seven wounded—the brave Lieutenant Nortje and Corporal J. Coetzee being amongst them.

A small fort, situated between the others, had been

overlooked, through a misunderstanding, and a score of soldiers who were garrisoning it had been forgotten and omitted to be disarmed.

An undisciplined commando is not easily managed at times. It takes all the officers' tact and shrewdness to get all the captured goods — like arms, ammunition, provisions, &c.—transported, especially when drink is found in a captured camp.

When we discussed the victory afterwards, it became quite clear that our tactics in storming the enemy's positions on the east and south sides had been pregnant of excellent results, for the English were not at all prepared at these points, though they had been on their guard to the north. In fact it had been very trying work to force them to surrender there. The officer in command, who was subsequently discharged from the British Army, had done his best, but he was wounded in the head at the beginning of the fight, and so far as I could ascertain there had been nobody to take his place. Three lieutenants were surprised in their beds and made prisoners-of-war. In the big fort where we found the naval gun, a captain of the garrison's artillery was in command. This fortress had been stormed, as already stated, from the side on which the attack had not been expected and the captain had not had an opportunity of firing many shots from his revolver, when he was wounded in the arm and compelled to surrender to the burghers who rushed up. Two hundred and fifty prisoners, including four officers, were made, the majority belonging to the Liverpool regiment and the 18th regiment of Hussars. They were all taken to our laager.

We succeeded in bringing away the captured gun in perfect order, also some waggons. Unfortunately the cart with the projectiles or shell, stuck in the morass and had to be left behind.

I gave orders to have a gun which we had left with the reserve burghers at Bakenkop, brought up, to open fire on the two pieces which were firing at us from Zwartkoppies, and to cover our movements while we were taking away the prisoners-of-war and the captured stores. I was in hopes of getting an opportunity of releasing the carts which stuck. But Fate was against us. A heavy hailstorm accompained by thunder and lightning, fiercer than I have ever witnessed in South Africa before, broke over our heads. Several times the lightning struck the ground around us, and the weather became so alarming that the drunken "Tommies" began to talk about their souls, and further efforts to save the carts had to be abandoned.

Whoever may have been the officer in command at Zwartkoppies he really deserved a D.S.O., which he obtained, too.

What that order really means I wot not, but I know that an English soldier is quite prepared to risk his life to deserve one, and as the decoration itself cannot be very expensive, it pays the British Government to be very liberal with it. A Boer would be satisfied with nothing less than promotion as a reward for heroism.

When the storm subsided we went on. It was a remarkable sight—a long procession of "Tommies," burghers, carts, and the naval gun, 18 feet long, an elephantine one when compared with our small guns.

It struck me again on this occasion what little bad feeling there was really between Boer and Briton, and how they both fight simply to do their duty as soldiers. As I rode along the stream of men I noticed several groups of burghers and soldiers sitting together along the road, eating from one tin of jam and dividing their loaf between them, and drinking out of the same field flask.

I remember some snatches of conversation I overheard:—

TOMMY: By Jove, but you fellows gave us jip. If you had come a little later you wouldn't have got us so easy, you know.

BURGHER: Never mind, Tommy, we got you. I suppose next time you will get us. Fortunes of war, you know. Have some more, old boy. Oh, I say, here is the general coming.

TOMMY: Who's he? Du Wyte or Viljohn?

And then as I passed them the whole group would salute very civilly.

We stopped at Dullstroom that night, where we found some lodgings for the captured British officers. We were sorry one of the Englishmen had not been given time to dress himself properly, for we had a very scanty stock of clothes, and it was difficult to find him some.

The next morning I found half a dozen prisoners-of-war had sustained slight flesh wounds during the fight, and I sent them on a trolley to Belfast with a dispatch to General Smith-Dorrien, informing him that four of his officers and 250 men were in our hands, that they would be well looked after, and that I now send back the slightly wounded who had been taken away by mistake.

I will try to give the concluding sentence of my communication as far as I remember it, and also the reply to it. I may add the words "The Lady Roberts" had been chiselled on the naval gun, and that many persons had just been expelled from Pretoria and other places as being considered "undesirables."

My letter wound up as follows:—

"I have been obliged to expel "The Lady Roberts" from Helvetia, this lady being an "undesirable" inhabitant of that place. I am glad to inform you that she seems quite at home in her new surroundings, and pleased with the change of company."

To which General Smith-Dorrien replied:

"As the lady you refer to is not accustomed to sleep in the open air, I would recommend you to try flannel next to the skin."

I had been instructed to keep the officers we had taken prisoners until further orders, and these four were

therefore lodged in an empty building near Roos Senekal under a guard. The Boers had christened this place "Ceylon," but the officers dubbed it "the house beaufitul" on account of its utter want of attractiveness.

They were allowed to write to their relatives and friends, to receive letters, and food and clothes, which were usually sent through our lines under the white flag. The company was soon augmented by the arrivals of many other British officers who were taken prisoners from time to time.

The 250 captured rank and file were given up to the British authorities at Middelburg some days after, for military reasons.

"The Lady Roberts" was the first and so far the last big gun taken from the English, and we are proud to say that never during this War, notwithstanding all our vicissitudes and reverses, have the British succeeded in taking one of our big guns.

One might call this bragging, but that is not my intention and I do not think I am given to boasting. We only relate it as one of the most remarkable incidents of the War, and as a fact which we may recall with satisfaction.

As already related, the cart with the shells for "The Lady Roberts" had to be left behind after the battle. Nothing would have given us greater pleasure than to send some shells from "Her Ladyship" into the Belfast camp on the last day of 1900, with the "Compliments of the Season." Not of course, in order to cause any destruction, but simply as a New Year's greeting. We would have sent them close by like the Americans in Mark Twain's book: "Not right in it, you know, but close by or near it." Only the shells were wanting, for with the gun were 50 charged "hulzen" and a case of cordite "schokbuizen."

We tried to make a shell from an empty "Long Tom" one, by cutting the latter down, for the "Long Toms"

shells were of greater calibre, and after having it filled with four pompom bullets, some cordite etc., we made it tight with copper wire, and soldered the whole together.

But when the shell was fired it burst a few steps away from the mouth of the cannon, and we had to abandon all hope of ever hearing a shout from the distinguished "Lady's" throat.

It was stowed away safely in the neighbourhood of Tautesberg and guarded by a group of cattle-farmers, or rather "bush-lancers," as they were afterwards called, in case we should get hold of the proper shells some day or other.

In connection with the attack on Helvetia I should like to quote the following lines, written by one of our poetasters, State-Secretary Mr. F. W. Reitz, in the field, although the translation will harly give an adequate idea of the peculiar treatment of the subject:—

"Hurrah for General Muller, hurrah for Ben Viljoen,
They went for 'Lady Roberts' and caught her very soon.
They caught her at Helvetia, great was Helvetia's fall!
Come up and see 'The Lady,' you Ooms and Tantes all.

It was a Christmas present (they made a splendid haul),
And sent 'The Lady Roberts,' a present to Oom Paul.
It cheered the poor Bush-lancers, it cheered the 'trek boers' all,
It made them gladly answer to freedom's battle call.

Lord Roberts gave up fighting, he did not care a rap,
But left his dear old 'Lady,' who's fond of mealie-pap.
Of our dear wives and children he burned the happy homes,
He likes to worry Tantes but fears the sturdy Ooms.

But his old 'Lady Roberts' (the lyddite-spitting gun),
He sent her to Helvetia to cheer the garrison;
He thought she would be safe there, in old Smith-Dorrien's care;
To leave the kopjes' shelter the Boers would never dare.

Well done, Johannesburgers, Boksburgers, and police,
Don't give them any quarter, don't give them any peace;
Before the sleepy "Tommies" could get their stockings on,
The forts were stormed and taken, and all the burghers gone.

We took 300 soldiers, provisions, and their guns,
And of their ammunition we captured many tons.
'This is guerilla warfare,' says Mr. Chamberlain,

But those we have bowled over will never fight again.

Let Roberts of Kandahar, and Kitchener of Khartoum,
Let Buller of Colenso make all their cannon boom.
They may mow down the kaffirs, with shield and assegai,
But on his trusty Mauser the burgher can rely.

For now the white man's fighting, these heroes dare not stay,
Lord Kitchener's in Pretoria, the others ran away.
Lord Roberts *can't* beat burghers, although he *Can*-dahar,
The Lords are at a distance, the Generals few and far!

They may annex and conquer, have conquered and annexed,
Yet when the Mauser rattles the British are perplexed.
Stand firm then, Afrikanders, prolong the glorious fight,
Unfurl the good old 'Vierkleur.' Stand firm, for right is might!

What though the sky be clouded, what though the light be gone;
The day will dawn to-morrow the sun will shine anon;
And though in evil moments a hero's hand may fail,
The strong will be confounded and right will yet prevail!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

A DISMAL "HAPPY NEW YEAR."

THIS is the 31st of December, 1900, two days after the victory gained by our burghers over the English troops at Helvetia, at the same time the last day of the year, or, as they call it, "New Year's Eve"; which is celebrated in our country with great enjoyment. The members of each family used to meet on that day, sometimes coming from all parts of the country. If this could not be done they would invite their most intimate friends to come and see the Old Year out—to "ring out the old, and ring in the new," for "Auld Lang Syne." This was one of the most festive days for everybody in South Africa. On the 31st of December, 1899, we had had to give up our time-honoured custom, there being no chance of joining in the friendly gathering at home, most of us having been at the front since the beginning of October, 1899, while our commandos were still in the very centre of Natal or in the northern part of Cape Colony; Ladysmith, Kimberley, and Mafeking were still besieged, and on the 15th of December the great victory of Colenso over the English Army had been won.

It is true that even then we were far from our beloved friends, but those who had not been made prisoners were still in direct communication with those who were near and dear to them. And although we were unable to pass the great day in the family circle, yet we could send our best wishes by letter or by wire. We had then hoped it would be the last time we should have to spend the last day of the year under such distressing

circumstances, trusting the war would soon be over.

Now 365 days had gone by—long, dreary, weary days of incessant struggle; and again our expectations had not been realised, and our hopes were deferred. We were not to have the privilege of celebrating "the Old and the New" with our people as we had so fervently wished the previous year on the Tugela.

The day would pass under far more depressing circumstances. In many homes the members of the family we left behind would be prevented from being in a festive mood, thinking as they were of the country's position, while mourning the dead, and pre-occupied with the fate of the wounded, of those who were missing, or known to be prisoners-of-war.

It was night-time, and everybody was under the depression of the present serious situation. Is it necessary to say that we were all absorbed in our thoughts, reviewing the incidents of the past year?. Need we say that everyone of us was thinking with sadness of our many defeats, of the misery suffered on the battlefields, of our dead and wounded and imprisoned comrades; how we had been compelled to give up Ladysmith, Kimberley, and Mafeking, and how the principal towns of our Republics, Bloemfontein and Pretoria, where our beloved flag had been flying for so many long years, over an independent people, were now in the hands of the enemy? Need we say we were thinking that night more than ever of our many relatives who had sacrificed their blood and treasure in this melancholy War for the good Cause; of our wives and children, who did not know what had become of us, and whom most of us had not seen for the last eight months. Were they still alive? Should we ever see them alive? Such were the terrible thoughts passing through our minds as we silently sat round the fires that evening.

Nor did anything tend to relieve the sombre monotony.

This time we should not have a chance of receiving some little things to cheer us up and remind us that our dearest friends had thought of us. Our fare would that day be the eternal meat and mealies—mealies and meat.

But why call to mind all these sombre memories of the past? Sufficient unto the day it seems was the evil thereof. Why sum up the misery of a whole year's struggles? And thus we "celebrated" New Year's Eve of 1900, till we found our consolation in that greatest of blessings to a tired-out man—a refreshing sleep.

But no sooner had we risen next morning than the cheerful compliments: "A Happy New Year!" or "My best wishes for the New Year" rang in our ears. We were all obviously trying to lay stress on the possible blessings of the future, so as to make each other forget the past, but I am afraid we did not expect the fulfilment of half, of what we wished.

For well we knew how bad things were all round how many dark clouds were hanging over our heads, and how very few bright spots were visible on the political horizon.

CHAPTER XXX.

GENERAL ATTACK ON BRITISH FORTS.

MY presence was requested on the 3rd of January, 1901, by the Commandant-General at a Council of War, which was to be held two days after at Hoetspruit, some miles east of Middelburg. General Botha would be there with his staff, and a small escort would take him from Ermelo over the railway through the enemy's lines. My commandos were to hold themselves in readiness. There was no doubt in my mind as to there being some great schemes on the cards, and that the next day we should have plenty to do, for the Commandant-General would not come all that way unless something important was on. And why should my commandos have to keep themselves in readiness?

On the morning of the 5th I went to the place of destination, which we reached at 11 o'clock, to find the Commandant-General and suite had already arrived. General Botha had been riding all night long in order to get through the enemy's lines, and had been resting in the shadow of a tree at Hoetspruit. The meeting of his adjutants and mine was rather boisterous, and woke him up, whereupon he rose immediately and came up to me with his usual genial smile. We had often been together for many months in the War, and the relations between us had been very cordial. I therefore do not hesitate to call him a bosom-friend, with due respect to his Honour as my chief.

"Hullo, old brother, how are you?" was Botha's welcome.

"Good morning, General, thank you, how are you?" I replied.

My high appreciation of, and respect for his position, made me refrain from calling him Louis, although we did not differ much in age, and were on intimate terms.

"I must congratulate you upon your successful attack on Helvetia. You made a nice job of it," he said. "I hope you had a pleasant New Year's Eve. But," he went on, "I am sorry in one way, for the enemy will be on his guard now, and we may not succeed in the execution of the plans we are going to discuss to-day, and wich concern those very districts."

"I am sorry, General," I replied, "but of course I know nothing of those plans."

"Well," rejoined the Commandant-General, "we will try anyhow, and hope for the best."

An hour later we met in council. Louis Botha briefly explained how he had gone with General Christian Botha and Tobias Smuts, with 1,200 men, to Komatiboven, between Carolina and Belfast, where they had left the commandos to cross the line in order to meet the officers who were to the north of it with the object of going into the details of a combined attack on the enemy's camps.

All were agreed and so it was dicided that the attack would be made during the night of the 7th of January, at midnight, the enemy's positions being stormed simultaneously.

The attack was to be made in the following way: The Commandant-General and General C. Botha along with F. Smuts, would attack on the southern side of the garrisons, in the following places: Pan Station, Wonderfontein Station, Belfast Camp and Station, Dalmanutha and Machadodorp, while I was to attack these places from the north. The

commandos would be divided so as to have a field-cornet's force charge at each place.

I must say that I had considerable difficulty in trying to make a little go a long way in dividing my small force along such a long line of camps, but the majority were in favour of this "frittering-away" policy, and so it had to be done.

The enemy's strength in different places was not easy to ascertain. I knew the strongest garrison at Belfast numbered over 2,500 men, and this place was to be made the chief point of attack, although the Machadodorp garrison was pretty strong too. The distance along which the simultaneous attack was to be made was about 22 miles and there were at least seven points to be stormed, viz., Pan Station, Wonderfontein, Belfast Village, Monument Hill (near Belfast), the coal mines (near Belfast), Dalmanutha Station and Machadodorp. A big programme, no doubt.

I can only, of course, give a description of the incidents on my side of the railway line, for the blockhouses and the forts provided with guns, which had been built along the railway, separated us entirely from the commandos to the south. The communication between both sides of the railway could be only kept up at night time and with a great amount of trouble, by means of despatch-carriers. We, therefore, did not even know how the attackingparties on the southern side had been distributed. All we knew was, that any place which was to be attacked from the north would also be stormed from the south at the same time, except the coal mine west of Belfast, occupied by Lieutenant Marshall with half a section of the Gloucester Regiment, which we were to attack separately, as it was situated some distance north of the railway line.

I arranged my plans as follows: Commandant Trichardt, with two field-cornets possés of Middelburgers and one of Germiston burghers, were to attack Pan and Wonderfontein;

the State Artillery would go for the coal mine; the Lydenburgers look after Dalmanutha and Machadodorp; while General Muller with the Johannesburgers and Boksburgers would devote their attention to Monument Hill.

I should personally attack Belfast Village, with a detachment of police, passing between the coal mine and Monument Hill. My attack could only, of course, be commenced after that on the latter two places had turned out successfully, as otherwise I should most likely have my retreat cut off.

In the evening of the 7th of January all the commandos marched, for the enemy would have been able to see us from a distance on this flat ground if we had started in the daytime, and would have fired at us with their 4.7 guns, one of which we knew to be at Belfast. We had to cover a distance of 15 miles between dusk and midnight. There was therefore no time to be lost, for a commando moves very slowly at night time if there is any danger in front. If the danger comes from the rear, things very often move quicker than is good for the horses. Then the men have to be kept together, and the guides are followed up closely, for if any burghers were to lag behind and the chain be broken, 20 or 30 of them might stray which would deprive us of their services.

It was one of those nights, known in the Steenkamp Mountains as "dirty nights," very dark, with a piercing easterly wind, which blew an incessant, fine, misty rain into our faces. About nine o'clock the mist changed into heavy rains, and we were soon drenched to the skin, for very few of us wore rainproof cloaks.

At ten the rain left off, but a thick fog prevented us from seeing anything in front of us, while the cold easterly wind had numbed our limbs, almost making them stiff. Some of the burghers had therefore to be taken up by the ambulance in order to have their circulation restored by

means of some medicine or artificial treatment. The impenetrable darkness made it very difficult to get on, as we were obliged to keep contact by means of despatch-riders; for, as already stated, I had to wait with the police for the result of the attack on the two positions to the right and left of me.

Exactly at midnight all had arrived at the place of destination. Unfortunately the wind was roaring so loudly as to prevent any firing being heard even at a hundred paces distant.

The positions near Monument Hill and the coal mine were attacked simultaneously, but unfortunately our artillerymen could not distinctly see the trenches on account of the darkness, and they charged right past them, and had to turn back when they became aware of the fact, by which time the enemy had found out what was up, and allowed their assailants to come close up to them (it was a round fort about five feet high with a trench round it), and received them with a tremendous volley. The artillerymen, however, charged away pluckily, and before they had reached the wall four were killed and nine wounded. The enemy shot fiercely and aimed well.

Our brave boys stormed away, and soon some of them jumped over the wall and a hand-to-hand combat ensued. The commanding officer of the fortress, Lieutenant Marshall, was severely wounded in the leg, which fact must have had a great influence on the course of the fight, for he surrendered soon after. Some soldiers managed to escape, some were killed, about 10 wounded, and 25 were taken prisoners. No less than five artillerymen were killed and 13 wounded, amongst the latter being the valiant Lieutenant Coetsee who afterwards was cruelly murdered by kaffirs near Roos Senekal. The defenders as well as the assailants had behaved excellently.

Near Monument Hill, at some distance from the position,

the burghers' horses were left behind, and the men marched up in scattered order, in the shape of a crescent. When we arrived at the enemy's outposts they had formed up at 100 paces from the forts, but in the dark the soldiers did not see us till we almost ran into them. There was no time to waste words. Fortunately, they surrendered without making any defence, which made our task much lighter, for if one shot had been fired, the garrison of the forts would have been informed of our approach. Only at 20 paces distance from the forts near the Monument (there were four of them), we were greeted with the usual "Halt, who goes there." After this had been repeated three times without our taking any notice, and as we kept coming closer, the soldiers fired from all the forts. Only now could we see how they were situated. We found them to be surrounded by a barbed wire fence which was so strong and thick that some burghers were soon entangled in it, but most of them got over it.

The first fort was taken after a short but sharp defence, the usual "hurrah" of the burghers jumping into the fort was, like a whisper of hope in the dark, an encouragement to the remainder of the storming burghers, who now soon took the other forts, not without having met with a stout resistance. Many burghers were killed, amongst whom the brave Field-Cornet John Ceronie, and many were wounded.

It had looked at first as if the enemy did not mean to give in, but we could not go back, and "onward" was the watchword. In several instances there was a struggle at a few paces' distance, only the wall of the fort intervening between the burghers and the soldiers. The burghers cried: "Hands up, you divils," but the soldiers replied: "Hy kona," a kaffir expression which means "shan't."

"Jump over the walls, my men!" shouted my officers, and at last they were in the forts: not, of course, without

the loss of many valuable lives. A "melée" now followed; the English struck about with their guns and with their fists, and several burghers lay on the ground wrestling with the soldiers. One "Tommy" wanted to thrust a bayonet through a Boer, but was caught from behind by one of the latter's comrades, and knocked down and a general hand-to-hand fight ensued, a rolling over and over, till one of the parties was exhausted, disarmed, wounded, or killed. One of the English captains (Vosburry) and 40 soldiers were found dead or wounded, several having been pierced by their own bayonets.

Some burghers had been knocked senseless with the butt-end of a rifle in the struggle with the enemy.

This carnage had lasted for twenty minutes, during which the result had been decided in our favour, and a "hurrah," full of glory and thankfulness, came from the throats of some hundreds of burghers. We had won the day, and 81 prisoners-of-war had been made, including two officers—Captain Milner and Lieutenant Dease—both brave defenders of England's flag.

They belonged to the Royal Irish Regiment, of which all Britons should be proud.

In the captured forts we found a Maxim, in perfect order, 20 boxes of ammunition, and other things, besides provisions, also a quantity of spirits, which was, however, at once destroyed, to the disappointment of many burghers.

We now pushed on to Belfast village, but found every cliff and ditch occupied. All efforts to get in touch with the commandos which meant to attack the village from the south were without avail. Besides, we did not hear a single shot fired, and did not know what had become of the attack from the south. In intense darkness we were firing at each other from time to time, so that it was not advisable to continue our operations under the circumstances, and at daybreak I told all my commandos to desist.

The attacks on Wonderfontein, Pan Station, Dalmanutha, and Machadodorp had failed.

I afterwards received a report from the commandos on the other side of the line, that, owing to the dark night, their attacks, although they were made with deliberation and great bravery, had all been unsuccessful. They had repeatedly missed the forts and had shot at one another.

General Christian Botha had succeeded in capturing some of the enemy's outposts, and in pushing on had come across a detachment of Gordon Highlanders and been obliged to retire with a loss of 40 killed and wounded.

We found, therefore, these forts in the hands of the soldiers, who, in my opinion, belonged to the best regiments of the English army.

The guests of our Government, at "the house beautiful" near Roos Senekal were thus added to by two gentlemen, Captain Milner and Lieutenant Dease, and they were my prisoners-of-war for four months, during which time I found Captain Milner one of the most worthy British officers whom it had been my privilege to meet in this War. Not only in his manly appearance, but especially by his noble character he stood head and shoulders above his fellow-officers.

Lieutenant Dease bore a very good character but was young and inexperienced. For several reasons I am pleased to be able to make publicly these statements.

The soldiers we had made prisoners during this fight, as well as those we took at Helvetia, were given up to the British officers a few days afterwards, as we were not in a position to feed them properly, and it would not be humane or fair to keep the soldiers who had the misfortune of falling into our hands without proper food. This, of course, was a very unsatisfactory state of affairs, for we had to fight fiercely, valuable lives had to be sacrificed, every nerve had to be strained to force the enemy to

surrender, and to take his positions; and then, when we had captured them, the soldiers were merely disarmed and sent back to the English lines after a little while, only to find them fighting against us once more in a few days.

The Boers asked, "Why are not these "Tommies" required to take the oath before being liberated not to fight against us again?" I believe this would have been against the rules of civilised warfare, and we did not think it chivalrous to ask a man who was a prisoner to take an oath in return for his release.

A prisoner-of-war has no freedom of action, and might have promised under the circumstances what he would not have done if he had been a free man.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A "BLUFF" AND A BATTLE.

THE last days of February, 1901, were very trying for our commandos on the "Hoogeveld," south of the railway. General French, assisted by half a dozen other generals, with a force of 60,000 men, crossed the „Hoogeveld," between the Natal border and the Delagoa Railway, driving all the burghers and cattle before him, continually closer to the Swazi frontier, in order to strike a "final blow" there.

These operations the English called "The Great Sweep of February, 1901."

Commandant-General Botha sent word that he was in a bad plight on the "Hoogeveld," the enemy having concentrated all his available troops upon him. I was asked to divert their attention as much as possible by repeated attacks on the railway line, and to worry them everywhere.

To attack the fortified entrenchments in these parts, where we had only just been taking the offensive, causing the enemy to be on his guard, would not have been advisable. I therefore decided to make a feint attack on Belfast.

One night we moved with all the burghers who had horses, about 15 carts, waggons, and other vehicles, guns and pom-pom, to a high "bult," near the "Pannetjes." When the sun rose the next morning we were in full sight of the enemy at Belfast, from which we were about ten miles away.

Here our commando was split into two parts, and the mounted men spread about in groups of fifty men each, with carts scattered everywhere among the ranks. We slowly approached Belfast in this order. Our commando numbered about 800 men, and considering the way we were distributed, this would look three times as many. We halted several times, and the heliographers, who were posted everywhere in sight of the enemy, made as much fuss as possible. Scouts were riding about everywhere, making a great display by dashing about all over the place, from one group of burghers to another. After we had waited again for some little time we moved on, and thus the comedy lasted till sunset; in fact, we had got within range of the enemy's guns. We had received information from Belfast to the effect that General French had taken all the guns with him to Belfast, leaving only a few of small calibre, which could not reach us until we were at about 4,000 yards from the fort. Our pom-pom and our 15-pounder were divided between the two divisions, and the officers had orders to fire a few shots on Belfast at sunset. We could see all day long how the English near Monument Hill were making ditches round the village and putting up barbed wire fences.

Trains were running backwards and forwards between Belfast and the nearest stations, probably to bring up reinforcements.

At twilight we were still marching, and by the light of the last rays of the sun we fired our two valuable field-pieces simultaneously, as arranged. I could not see where the shells were falling, but we heard them bursting, and consoled ourselves with the idea that they must have struck in near the enemy. Each piece sent half a dozen shells, and some volleys were fired from a few rifles at intervals. We thought the enemy would be sure to take this last movement for a general attack. What he

really did think, there is no saying. As the burghers put it, "We are trying to make them frightened, but the thing to know is, did they get frightened?" For this concluded our programme for the day, and we retired for the night, leaving the enemy in doubt as to whether we meant to give him any further trouble, yet without any apology for having disturbed his rest.

The result of this bloodless fight was *nil* in wounded and killed on both sides.

On the 12th of February, 1901, the first death-sentence on a traitor on our side was about to be carried out, when suddenly our outposts round Belfast were attacked by a strong British column under General Walter Kitchener. When the report was brought to our laager, all the burghers went to the rescue, in order to keep the enemy as far from the laager as possible, and beat them back. Meanwhile the outposts retired fighting all the while. We took up the most favourable positions we could and waited. The enemy did not come up close to us that evening, but camped out on a round hill between Dullstroom and Belfast and we could distinctly see how the soldiers were all busy digging ditches and trenches round the camp and putting up barbed wire enclosures. They were very likely afraid of a night attack and did not forget the old saying about being "wise in time."

Near the spot where their camp was situated were several roads leading in different directions which left us in doubt as to which way they intended to go, and whether they wanted to attack us, or were on their way to Witpoort-Lydenburg.

The next morning, at sunset, the enemy broke up his camp and made a stir. First came a dense mass of mounted men, who after having gone about a few hundred paces, split up into two divisions. One portion moved in a westerly direction, the other to the north, slowly followed

by a long file, or as they say in Afrikander "gedermte" (gut) of waggons and carts which, of course, formed the convoy. Companies of infantry, with guns, marched between the vehicles.

I came to the conclusion that they intended to attack from two sides, and therefore ordered the ranks to scatter. General Muller, with part of the burghers, went in advance of the enemy's left flank and as the English spread out their ranks, we did the same.

At about 9 a.m. our outposts near the right flank of the English were already in touch with the enemy, and rifle-fire was heard at intervals.

I still had the old 15-pounder, but the stock of ammunition had gone down considerably and the same may be said of the pom-pom of Rhenosterkop fame. We fired some shots from the 15-pounder at a division of cavalry at the foot of a kopje. Our worthy artillery sergeant swore he had hit them right in the centre, but even with my strong spy-glass I could not see the shells burst, although I admit the enemy showed a little respect for them, which may be concluded from the fact that they at once mounted their horses and looked for cover.

A British soldier is much more in awe of a shell than a Boer is, and the enemy's movements are therefore not always a criterion of our getting the range. We had, moreover, only some ordinary grenades left, some of which would not burst, as the "schokbuizen" were defective, and we could not be sure of their doing any harm.

The other side had some howitzers, which began to spit about lyddite indiscriminately. They also had some quick-firing guns of a smal calibre, which, however, did not carry particularly far. But they were a great nuisance, as they would go for isolated burghers without being at all economical with their ammunition.

Meanwhile, the enemy's left reached right up to

Schoonport, where some burghers, who held good positions, were able to fight them. This caused continual collisions with our outposts. Here, also, the assailants had two 15-pounder Armstrong's, which fired at any moving target, and hardly ever desisted, now on one or two burghers who showed themselves, then on a tree, or an ant-hill, or a protruding rock. They thus succeeded in keeping up a deafening cannonade, which would have made one think there was a terrific fight going on, instead of which it was a very harmless bombardment.

It did no more harm than at the English manœuvres, although it was no doubt a brilliant demonstration, a sort of performance to show the British Lion's prowess. I could not see the practical use of it though.

It was only on the enemy's right wing that we got near enough to feel some of the effect of the artillery's gigantic efforts, which here forced us to some sharp but innocent little fights between the outposts. At about four o'clock in the afternoon, the British cavalry stormed our left, which was in command of General Muller. We soon repulsed them, however. Half an hour after we saw the enemy's carts go back.

I sent a heliographic message to General Muller, with whom I had kept in close contact, to the effect that they were moving away their carts and that we ought to try and charge them on all points as well as we could.

"All right," he answered; "shall we start at once?" I flashed back "Yes," and ordered a general charge.

The burghers now appeared all along the extended fighting line.

The enemy's guns, wich were just ready to be moved, were again placed in position and opened fire, but our men charged everywhere, a sort of action which General Kitchener did not seem to like, for his soldiers began to flee with their guns, and a general confusion ensued. Some

of these guns were still being fired at the Boers but the latter stormed away determinedly The British lost many killed and wounded.

The cavalry fled in such a hurry as to leave the infantry as the only protection of the guns, and although these men also beat a retreat they, at least, did it while fighting.

I do not think I overstate the case by declaring that General Walter Kitchener owed it to the stubborn defence of his infantry that his carts were not captured by us that day.

Their ambulance, in charge of Dr. Mathews and four assistants, and some wounded fell into our hands, and were afterwards sent back.

We pursued the enemy as well as we could, but about nine miles from Belfast, towards which the retreating enemy was marching, the forts opened fire on us from a 4·7 naval gun and they got the range so well that lyddite shells were soon bursting about our ears.

We were now in the open, quite exposed and in sight of the Belfast forts. Two of our burghers were wounded here.

Field-Cornet Jaapie Kriege, who was afterwards killed, with about 35 burghers, was trying to cut off the enemy from a "spruit"-drift; the attack was a very brave one, but our men ventured too far, and would all have been captured had not the other side been so much in a hurry to get away from us. Luckily, too, another field-cornet realised the situation, and kept the enemy well under fire, thus attracting Kriege's attention, who now got out of this scrape.

When night fell we left the enemy alone, and went back to our laager. The next morning the outposts reported that the would-be assailants were all gone.

How much this farce had cost General Kitchener we

could not tell with certainty. An English officer told me afterwards he had been in the fight, and that their loss there had been 52 dead and wounded, including some officers. He also informed me that their object that day had been to dislodge us. If that is so, I pity the soldiers who were told to do this work.

Our losses were two burghers wounded, as already stated.

CHAPTER XXXII.

EXECUTION OF A TRAITOR.

AS briefly referred to in the last chapter, there occurred in the early part of February, 1901, what I always regard as one of the most unpleasant incidents of the whole Campaign, and which even now I cannot record without awakening the most painful recollections. I refer to the summary execution of a traitor in our ranks, and inasmuch as a great deal has been written of this tragic episode, I venture to state the particulars of it in full. The facts of the case are as follows:—

At this period of the War, as well as subsequently, much harm was done to our cause by various burghers who surrendered to the enemy, and who, actuated by the most sordid motives, assisted the British in every possible way against us. Some of these treacherous Boers occasionally fell into our hands, and were tried by court-martial for high treason; but however damning the evidence brought against them they usually managed to escape with some light punishment. On some occasions sentence of death was passed on them, but it was invariably commuted to imprisonment for life, and as we had great difficulty in keeping such prisoners, they generally succeeded, sooner or later, in making their escape. This mistaken leniency was the cause of much dissatisfaction in our ranks, which deeply resented that these betrayers of their country should escape scot-free.

About this time a society was formed at Pretoria,

chiefly composed of surrendered burghers, called the "Peace Committee," but better known to us as the "Hands-uppers." Its members surreptitiously circulated pamphlets and circulars amongst our troops, advising them to surrender and join the enemy. The impartial reader will doubtless agree that such a state of things was not to be tolerated. Imagine, for example, that English officers and soldiers circulated similar communications amongst the Imperial troops! Would such proceedings have been tolerated?

The chairman of this society was a man by the name of Meyer De Kock, who had belonged to a Steenkampsberg field-cornet's force and had deserted to the enemy. He was the man who first suggested to the British authorities the scheme of placing the Boer women and children in Concentration Camps—a system which resulted in so much misery and suffering—and he maintained that this would be the most effective way of forcing the Boers to surrender, arguing that no burgher would continue to fight when once his family was in British hands.

One day a kaffir, bearing a white flag, brought a letter from this person's wife addressed to one of my field-cornets, informing him that her husband, Mr. De Kock, wished to meet him and discuss with him the advisability of surrendering with his men to the enemy. My field-cornet, however, was sufficiently sensible and loyal to send no reply.

And so it occurred that one morning Mr. De Kock, doubtlessly thinking that he would escape punishment as easily as others had before him, had the audacity to ride coolly into our outposts. He was promptly arrested and incarcerated in Roos Senekal Gaol, this village being at the time in our possession. Soon afterwards he was tried by court-martial, and on the face of the most damning evidence, and on perusal of a host of incriminating documents found in his possession, was condemned to death.

About a fortnight later a waggon drove up to our

laager at Windhoek, carrying Lieutenant De Hart, accompanied by a member of President Burger's bodyguard, some armed burghers, and the condemned man De Kock. They halted at my tent, and the officer handed me an order from our Government, bearing the President's ratification of the sentence of death, and instructing me to carry it out within 24 hours. Needless to say I was much grieved to receive this order, but as it had to be obeyed I thought the sooner it was done the better for all concerned. So then and there on the veldt I approached the condemned man, and said:—

"Mr. De Kock, the Government has confirmed the sentence of death passed on you, and it is my painful duty to inform you that this sentence will be carried out to-morrow evening. If you have any request to make or if you wish to write to your family you will now have an opportunity of doing so."

At this he turned deadly pale, and some minutes passed before he had recovered from his emotion. He then expressed a wish to write to his family, and was conducted, under escort, to a tent, where writing materials were placed before him. He wrote a long communication to his wife, which we sent to the nearest British officers to forward to its destination. He also wrote me a letter thanking me for my "kind treatment," and requested me to forward the letter to his wife. Later on spiritual consolation was offered and administered to him by our pastor.

Next day, as related in the previous chapter, we were attacked by a detachment of General Kitchener's force from Belfast. This kept me busy all day, and I delegated two of my subaltern officers to carry out the execution. At dusk the condemned man was blindfolded and conducted te the side of an open grave, where twelve burghers fired a volley, and death was instantaneous I am told that De Kock met his fate with considerable fortitude.

So far as I am aware, this was the first Boer "execution" in our history. I afterwards read accounts of it in the English press, in which it was described as murder, but I emphatically repudiate this description of a wholly justifiable act. The crime was a serious one, and the punishment was well deserved, and I have no doubt that the same fate would have awaited any English soldier guilty of a similar offence. It seems a great pity, however, that no war can take place without these melancholy incidents.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

IN A TIGHT CORNER.

IT was now March, 1901. For some time our burghers had been complaining of inactivity, and the weary and monotonous existence was gradually beginning to pall on them. But it became evident that April would be an eventful month, as the enemy had determined not to suffer our presence in these parts any longer. A huge movement, therefore, was being set on foot to surround us and capture the whole commando *en bloc*.

It began with a night attack on a field-cornet's force posted at Kruger's Post, north of Lydenburg, and here the enemy succeeded in capturing 35 men and a quantity of a "impedimenta;" the field-cornet in question, although warned in time, having taken no proper precautions. By the middle of April the enemy's forward movement was in full swing. General Plumer came from Pietersburg, General Walter Kitchener from Lydenburg, and General Barber from Middelburg. They approached us in six different directions, altogether a force of 25,000 men, and the whole under the supreme command of General Sir Bindon Blood.

No escape was available for us through Secoekuniland on the north, as the natives here, since the British had occupied their territory, were avowedly hostile to us. To escape, therefore, we would have to break through the enemy's lines and also to cross the railway, which was closely guarded.

The enemy were advancing slowly from various

directions. All our roads were carefully guarded, and the cordon was gradually tightening around us. We were repeatedly attacked, now on this side, now on that, the British being clearly anxious to discover our position and our strength. In a sharp skirmish with a column from Lydenburg my faithful Fighting-General Muller was severely wounded in his shoulder, and a commando of Lydenburgers had been isolated from me and driven by the enemy along Waterfal River up to Steelpoort, where they encountered hostile tribes of kaffirs. The commandant of the corps after a short defence was obliged to destroy his guns, forsake his baggage, and escape with his burghers in small groups into the mountains.

Our position was growing more critical, but I resolved to make a stand before abandoning our carts and waggons, although there seemed little hope of being able to save anything. In fact the situation was extremely perilous. As far as I could see we were entirely hemmed in, all the roads were blocked, my best officer wounded, I had barely 900 men with me, and our stock of ammunition was very limited.

I have omitted to mention that early in April, when we first got an inkling of this move I had liberated all the British officers whom I had kept as prisoners at Middelburg, and thus saved the British authorities many a D.S.O. which would otherwise have been claimed by their rescuers.

The British around us were now posted as follows. At Diepkloof on the Tautesberg to the north-west of us; at Roodekraal, between Tautesberg and Bothasberg, to the west of us; at Koebold, under Roodehoogte; at Windhoek, to the east of us; at Oshoek, to the north-east; and to the north of us between Magneetshoogte and Klip Spruit. We were positioned on Mapochsberg near Roos Senekal, about midway between Tautesberg and Steenkampsberg. We had

carts, waggons, two field-pieces, and a Colt-Maxim.

We speedily discovered that we should have to leave our baggage and guns, and rely mainly on our horses and rifles. We had placed our hospitals as well as we could, one in an empty school-building at Mapochsberg with 10 wounded, under the care of Dr. Manning; the other, our only field-hospital, at Schoonpoort, under the supervision of Dr. H. Neethling. Whether these poor wounded Boers would have to be abandoned to the enemy, was a question which perplexed us considerably. If so, we should have been reduced to only one physician, Dr. Leitz, a young German who might get through with a pack-horse. Many officers and men, however, had lost all hope of escape.

It was about the 20th of April when the British approached so close that we had to fight all day to maintain our positions. I gave orders that same night that we should burn our waggons, destroy our guns with dynamite, and make a dash through the enemy's lines, those burghers who had no horses to mount the mules of the convoy. Hereupon about 100 burghers and an officer coolly informed me that they had had enough fighting, and preferred to surrender. I was at that time powerless to prevent them doing so, so I took away all their horses and ammunition, at which they did not seem very pleased. Before dusk our camp was a scene of wild confusion. Waggons and carts were burning fiercely, dynamite was being exploded, and horseless burghers were attempting to break in the mules which were to serve them as mounts. Meanwhile a skirmish was going on between our outposts and those of the enemy.

It was a strange procession that left Mapochsberg that night in our dash through the British lines. Many Boers rode mules, whilst many more had no saddles, and no small number were trudging along on foot, carrying their rifles and blankets on their shoulders. My scouts had reported that the best way to get through was on the

southern side along Steelpoort, about a quarter of a mile from the enemy's camp at Bothasberg. But even should we succeed in breaking through the cordon around us, we still had to cross the line at Wondersfontein before daybreak, so as not to get caught between the enemy's troops and the blockhouses.

About 100 scouts, who formed our advanceguard, soon encountered the enemy's sentries. They turned to the right, then turned to the left; but everywhere the inquisitive "Tommies" kept asking: "Who goes there?" Not being over anxious to satisfy their curiosity, they sent round word at once for us to lie low, and we started very carefully exploring the neighbourhood. But there seemed no way out of the mess. We might have attacked some weak point and thus forced our way through, but it was still four or five hours' ride to the railway line, and with our poor mounts we should have been caught and captured. Besides which the enemy might have warned the blockhouse garrisons, in which case we should have been caught between two fires.

No; we wanted to get through without being discovered, and seeing that this was that night hopeless, I consulted my officers and decided to return to our deserted camp, where we could take up our original positions without the enemy being aware of our noctural excursion.

Next morning the rising sun found us back in our old positions. We despatched scouts in all directions as usual, so as to make the enemy believe that we intended to remain there permanently, and we put ourselves on our guard, ready to repel an attack at any point on the shortest notice.

But the enemy were much too cautious, and evidently thought they had us safely in their hands. They amused themselves by destroying every living thing, and burned the houses and the crops. The whole veldt all round was

black, everything seemed in mourning, the only relief from this dull monotony of colour being that offorded by the innumerable specks of khaki all around us. I believe I said there were 25,000 men there, but it now seemed to me as if there were almost double that number.

We had to wait until darkness set in before making a second attempt at escape. The day seemed interminable. Many burghers were loudly grumbling, and even some officers were openly declaring that all this had been done on purpose. Of course, these offensive remarks were pointed at me. At last the situation became too serious. I could only gather together a few officers to oppose an attack from the enemy on the eastern side, and something had to be done to prevent a general mutiny. I therefore ordered a burgher who seemed loudest in his complaints to receive 15 lashes with a sjambok, and I placed a field-cornet under arrest. After this the grumblers remained sullenly silent.

The only loophole in the enemy's lines seemed to be in the direction of Pietersburg, on the portion held by General Plumer, who seemed far too busy capturing cattle and sheep from the "bush-lancers" to surround us closely. We therefore decided to take our chance there and move away as quickly as possible in that direction, and then to bear to the left, where we expected to find the enemy least watchful. Shortly before sunset I despatched 100 mounted men to ride openly in the opposite direction to that which we intended to take, so as to divert the enemy's attention from our scene of operations, and sat down to wait for darkness.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ELUDING THE BRITISH CORDON.

"THE shades of eve were falling fast" as we moved cautiously away from Mapochsberg and proceeded through Landdrift, Steelpoort, and the Tautesberg. At 3 o'clock in the morning we halted in a hollow place where we would not be observed, yet we were still a mile and a half from the enemy's cordon. Our position was now more critical than ever; for should the enemy discover our departure, and General Plumer hurry up towards us that morning, we should have little chance of escape.

During the day I was obliged to call all the burghers together, and to earnestly address them concerning the happenings of the previous day. I told them to tell me candidly if they had lost faith in me, or if they had any reason not to trust me implicitly, as I would not tolerate the way in which they had behaved the day before. I added:—

"If you cannot see your way clear to obey implicitly my commands, to be true to me, and to believe that I am true to you, I shall at once leave you, and you can appoint someone else to look after you. We are by no means out of the wood yet, and it is now more than ever necessary that we should be able to trust one another to the fullest extent. Therefore, I ask those who have lost confidence in me, or have any objection to my leading them, to stand out."

No one stirred. Other officers and burghers next rose and spoke, assuring me that all the rebels had derserted

the previous night, and that all the men with me would be true and faithful. Then Pastor J. Louw addressed the burghers very earnestly, pointing out to them the offensive way in which some of them had spoken of their superior officers, and that in the present difficult circumstances it was absolutely necessary that there should be no disintegration and discord amongst ourselves. I think all these perorations had a very salutary effect. But such were the difficulties that we officers had to contend with at the hands of undisciplined men who held exaggerated notions of freedom of action and of speech; and I was not the only Boer officer who suffered in this respect.

About two in the afternoon I gave the order to saddle up, as it was necessary to start before sunset in order to be able to cross the Olifant's River before daybreak, so that the enemy should not overtake us should they notice us. We dismounted and led our horses, for we had discovered that the English could not distinguish between a body of men leading their horses and a troop of cattle, so long as the horses were all kept close together. All the hills around us were covered with cattle captured from our "bush-lancers," and therefore our passage was unnoticed.

We followed an old waggon track along the Buffelskloof, where a road leads from Tautesberg to Blood River. The stream runs between Botha's and Tautesbergen, and flows into the Olifant's River near Mazeppa Drift. It is called Blood River on account of the horrible massacre which took place there many years before, when the Swazi kaffirs murdered a whole kaffir tribe without distinction of age or sex, literally turning the river red with blood.

Towards evening we reached the foot of the mountains, and moved in a north-westerly direction past Makleerewskop. We got through the English lines without any difficulty along some footpaths, but our progress was very slow, as we had to proceed in Indian file, and we had to stop

frequently to see that no one was left behind. The country was thickly wooded, and frequently the baggage on the pack-horses became entangled with branches of trees, and had to be disentangled and pulled off the horses' backs, which also caused considerable delay.

It was 3 o'clock in the morning before we reached the Olifant's River, at a spot which was once a footpath drift, but was now washed away and overgrown with trees and shrubs, making it very difficult to find the right spot to cross. Our only guide who knew the way had not been there for 15 years, but recognised the place by some high trees which rose above the others. We had considerable difficulty in crossing, the water reaching to our horses' saddles, and the banks being very steep. By the time we had all forded the sun had risen. All the other drifts on the river were occupied by the enemy, our scouts reporting that Mazeppa Drift, three miles down stream, was entrenched by a strong English force, as was the case with Kalkfontein Drift, a little higher up. I suppose this drift was not known to them, and thus had been left unguarded.

Having got through we rode in a northerly direction until about 9 o'clock in the morning, and not until then were we sure of being clear of the enemy's clutches. But there was a danger that the English had noticed our absence and had followed us up. I therefore sent out scouts on the high kopjes in the neighbourhood, and not until these had reported all clear did we take the risk of off-saddling. You can imagine how thankful we were after having been in the saddle for over 19 hours, and I believe our poor animals were no less thankful for a rest.

We had not slept for three consecutive nights, and soon the whole commando, with the exception of the sentries, were fast asleep. Few of us thought of food, for our fatigue and drowsiness were greater than our hunger.

But we could only sleep for two hours, for we were much too close to the enemy, and we wished to make them lose scent of us entirely.

The burghers grumbled a good deal at being awakened and ordered to saddle up, but we moved on nevertheless. I sent some men to enquire at a kaffir kraal for the way to Pietersburg, and although I had no intention of going in that direction, I knew that the kaffirs, so soon as we had gone, would report to the nearest British camp that they had met a commando of Boers of going there. Kaffirs would do this with the hope of reward, which they often received in the shape of spirituous liquor. We proceeded all that day in the direction of Pietersburg until just before sunset we came to a small stream. Here we stopped for an hour and then went on again, this time, however, to the left in a southerly direction through the bush to Poortjesnek near Rhenosterkop, where a little time before the fight with General Paget's force had taken place. We had to hurry through the bush, as horse-sickness was prevalent here and we still had a long way before us. It was midnight before we reached the foot of the Poortjesnek.

Here my officers informed me that two young burghers had become insane through fatigue and want of sleep, and that several, while asleep in their saddles had been pulled off their horses by low branches and severely injured. Yet we had to get through the Nek and get to the plateau before I could allow any rest. I went and had a look at the demented men. They looked as if intoxicated and were very violent. All our men and horses were utterly exhausted, but we pushed on and at last reached the plateau, where, to everybody's great delight, we rested for the whole day. The demented men would not sleep, but I had luckily some opium pills with me and I gave each man one of them, so that they got calmer, and, dropping off to sleep, afterwards recovered.

My scouts reported next day that a strong English patrol had followed us up, but that otherwise it was "all serene." We pushed on through Langkloof over our old fighting ground near Rhenosterkop, then through the Wilge River near Gousdenberg up to Blackwood Camp, about nine miles north of Balmoral Station. Here we stayed a few days to allow our animals to rest and recover from their hardships, and then moved on across the railway to the Bethel and Ermelo districts. Here the enemy was much less active, and we should have an opportunity of being left undisturbed for a little time. But we lost 40 of our horses, that had caught the dreaded horse-sickness whilst passing through the bush country.

On the second day of our stay at Blackwood Camp I sent 150 men under Commandants Groenwald and Viljoen through the Banks, via Staghoek, to attack the enemy's camp near Wagendrift on the Olifant's River. This was a detachment of the force which had been surrounding us. We discovered that they were still trying to find us, and that the patrol which had followed us were not aware of our having got away. It appears that they only discovered this several days afterwards, and great must have been the good general's surprise when they found that the birds had flown and their great laid schemes had failed.

My 150 men approached the enemy's camp early in the morning, and when at a short range began pouring in a deadly rifle fire on the western side. The British soldiers, who were not dreaming of an attack, ran to and fro in wild disorder. Our burghers, however, ceased firing when they saw that there were many women and children in the camp, but the enemy began soon to pour out a rifle and gun fire, and our men were obliged to carry on the fight.

After a few days' absence they returned to our camp and reported to me that "they had frightened the English

out of their wits, for they thought we were to the east at Roos Senekal, whereas we turned up from the west."

Of course the British speedily discovered where we were, and came marching up from Poortjesnek in great force. But we sent out a patrol to meet them, and the latter by passing them west of Rhenosterkop effectually misled them, and we were left undisturbed at Blackwood Camp.

This left us time to prepare for crossing the railway; so I despatched scouts south to see how matters stood, and bade them return the next day. We knew that a number of small commandos were located on the south side of the railway, but to effect a junction was a difficult matter, and we would risk getting trapped between the columns if we moved at random. The railway and all the roads were closely guarded, and great care was being taken to prevent any communication between the burghers on either side of the line.

CHAPTER XXXV.

BOER GOVERNMENT'S NARROW ESCAPE.

DURING the first week of May, 1901, we split up into two sections, and left Blackwood Camp early in the evening. General Muller took one section over the railway line near Brugspruit, whilst I took the other section across near Balmoral Station. We naturally kept as far from the blockhouses as possible, quietly cut the barbed-wire fences stretched all along the line, and succeeded in crossing it without a shot being fired. To split up into two sections was a necessary precaution, first because it would have taken the whole commando too long to cross the line at one point, and secondly, we made more sure of getting at least one section across. Further, had the enemy encountered one of the sections they would probably have concluded that that was our whole force.

We halted about six miles from the railway-line, as it was now 2 o'clock in the morning. I ordered a general dismount, and we were at last able to light up our pipes, which we had been afraid of doing in the neighbourhood of the railway for fear of the lights being seen by the enemy. The men sat round in groups, and smoked and chatted cheerfully. We passed the rest of the night here, and with the exception of the sentinels on duty, all were able to enjoy a refreshing sleep, lying down, however, with their unsaddled horses by their side, and the bridles in their hands—a most necessary and useful precaution. Together with my adjutant, Nel, I made the round of the sentries, sitting a a few moments with each to cheer them

up and keep them awake; for there is nothing to which I object more than to be surprised by the enemy, when asleep.

The few hours of rest afforded us passed very quickly, and at the first glimmer of dawn I ordered the men to be called This is simply done by the officers calling out "Opzâal, opzâal" (saddle-up) in loud tones. When it was light enough to look round us we had the satisfaction of seeing that all was quiet and that no troops were in the immediate neighbourhood. We made for a place called Kroomdraai, about halfway between Heidelberg and Middelburg, where we knew there were some mealies left; and although we should be between the enemy's camps there, I felt there would be no danger of being disturbed or surprised.

I also sent a report to the Commandant-General, who was at that time with the Government near Ermelo, and described to him all that had happened. I received a reply some days later, requesting me to leave my commando at Kroomdraai and proceed to see him, as an important Council of War was to be held between the various generals and the Government.

Four days later I arrived at Begin der Lijn ("beginning of the line") on the Vaal River, south-east of Ermelo, accompanied by three of my adjutants, and reported myself to the Commandant-General.

Simultaneously with my arrival there came two British columns, commanded by our old friend Colonel Bullock, whose acquaintance we had previously made at Colenso. They came apparently with the idea of chasing us, possibly thinking to catch us. This was far from pleasant for me. I had been riding post haste for four days, and I and my horse were very tired and worn out. However, there was no help for it. I had barely time to salute the members of the Government, and to exchange a few words with

General Botha, when we had to "quit." For eight days we wandered round with Colonel Bullock at our heels, always remaining, however, in the same neighbourhood. This officer's tactics in trying to capture us were childishly simple. During the day there would be skirmishes between the enemy and General Botha's men, but each evening the former would, by retiring, attempt to lull us into a sense of security. But as soon as the sun had set, they would turn right about face, return full speed to where they had left us, and there would surround us carefully during the night, gallantly attacking us in the morning and fully expecting to capture the whole Boer Government and at least half a dozen generals. This was a distinct nuisance, but the tactics of this worthy officer were so simple that we very soon discovered them. Accordingly, every evening we would make a fine pretence of pitching our camp for the night; but so soon as darkness had set in, we would take the precaution of moving some 10 or 15 miles further on. Next morning Colonel Bullock, who had been carefully "surrounding" us all night, would find that we were unaccountably absent. Much annoyed at this, he would then send his "flying" columus running after us. This went on for several days, until finally, as we expected, his horses were tired out, and I believe he was then removed to some other garrison, having been considered a failure as a "Boer-stalker." No doubt he did his best, but he nevertheless managed his business very clumsily.

Not until nine days after my arrival at this perambulating seat of Government did we have an opportunity of snatching a few hours' rest. We were now at a spot called Immegratie, between Ermelo and Wakkerstroom. Here a meeting was held by the Executive Council, and attended by the Commandant-General, General Jan Smuts, General C. Botha, and myself. General T. Smuts could not be present, as he was busy keeping Colonel Bullock amused.

At this meeting we discussed the general situation, and decided to send a letter to President Steyn, but our communication afterwards fell into the enemy's hands. In accordance with this letter, President Steyn and Generals De Wet and De la Rey joined our Government, and a meeting was held later on.

The day after this meeting at Immegratie I took leave of my friends and began the journey in a more leisurely fashion back to my commando at Kroomdraai, via Ermelo and Bethel. The Acting-President had made me a present of a cart and four mules, as they pitied us for having had to burn all our vehicles in escaping from Roos Senekal. We were thus once more seated in a cart, which added considerably to the dignity of our staff. How long I should continue to be possessed of this means of transport depended, of course, entirely on the enemy. My old coloured groom "Mooiroos," who followed behind leading my horse, evidently thought the same, for he remarked naïvely: "Baas, the English will soon fix us in another corner; had we not better throw the cart away?"

We drove into Ermelo that afternoon. The dread east wind was blowing hard and raising great clouds of dust around us. The village had been occupied about half a dozen times by the enemy and each time looted, plundered, and evacuated, and was now again in our possession. At least, the English had left it the day before, and a Landdrost had placed himself in charge; a little Hollander with a pointed nose and small, glittering eyes, who between each sentence that he spoke rolled round those little eyes of his, carefully scanning the neighbouring hills for any sign of the English. The only other person of importance in the town was a worthy predikant, who evidently had not had his hair cut since the commencement of the War, and who had great difficulty in keeping his little black wide-awake on his head. He seemed very proud of his abundant locks.

There were also a few families in the place belonging to the Red Cross staff and in charge of the local hospitals. One of my adjutants was seriously indisposed, and it was whilst hunting for a chemist in order to obtain medicine that I came into contact with the town's sparse population. I found the dispensary closed, the proprietor having departed with the English, and the Landdrost, fearing to get himself into trouble, was not inclined to open it. He grew very excited when we liberally helped ourselves to the medicines, and made himself unpleasant. So we gave him clearly to understand that his presence was not required in that immediate neighbourhood.

Our cart was standing waiting for us in the High Street, and during our absence a lady had appeared on the verandah of a house and had sent a servant to enquire who we were. When we reappeared laden with our booty she graciously invited us to come in. She was a Mrs. P. de Jager and belonged to the Red Cross Society. She asked us to stay and have some dinner, which was then being prepared. Imagine what a luxury for us to be once more in a house, to be addressed by a lady and to be served with a bountiful repast! Our clothes were in a ragged and dilapidated condition and we presented a very unkempt appearance, which did not make us feel quite at our ease. Still the good lady with great tact soon put as quite at home.

We partook of a delicious meal, which we shall not easily forget. I cannot remember what the menu was, and I am not quite sure whether it would compare favourably with a first-class café dinner, but I never enjoyed a meal more in my existence, and possibly never shall.

After dinner the lady related to us how on the previous day, when the British entered the village, there were in her house three convalescent burghers, who could, however, neither ride nor walk. With tears in her eyes she told

us how an English doctor and an officer had come there, and kicking open the doors of her neatly-kept house, had entered it, followed by a crowd of soldiers, who had helped themselves to most of the knives, forks, and other utensils. She tried to explain to the doctor that she had wounded men in the house, but he was too conceited and arrogant to listen to her protestations. Fortunately for them the men were not discovered, for the English, on leaving the village, took with them all our wounded, and even our doctor. With a proud smile she now produced this trio, who, not knowing whether we were friend or foe, were at first vere much frightened.

I sympathised with the lady with respect to the harsh treatment she had received the previous day, and thanking her for her great kindness, warned her not to keep armed burghers in her house, as this was against the Geneva Convention.

We told her what great pleasure it was for us to meet a lady, as all our women having been placed in Concentration Camps, we had only had the society of our fellow-burghers. Before leaving she grasped our hands, and with tears in her eyes wished us God speed: — 'Good-bye, my friends! May God reward your efforts on behalf of your country. General, be of good cheer; for however dark the future may seem, be sure that the Almighty will provide for you!" I can scarcely be dubbed sentimental, yet the genuine expressions of this good lady, coupled perhaps with her excellent dinner, did much to put us into better spirits, and somehow the future did not seem now quite so dark and terrible as we were proviously inclined to believe.

We soon resumed our journey, and that night arrived at a farm belonging to a certain Venter. We knew that here some houses had escaped the general destruction and we found that a dwelling house was still standing and that

the Venter family were occupying it. It was not our practice to pass the night near inhabited houses, as that might have got the people in to trouble with the enemy, but having off-saddled, I sent up an adjutant to the house to see if he could purchase a few eggs and milk for our sick companions. He speedily returned followed by the lady of the house in a very excited condition: —

"Are you the General?" she asked.

"I have that honour," I replied. "What is the matter?"

"There is much the matter," she retorted loudly. "I will have nothing to do with you or your people. You are nothing but a band of brigands and scoundrels, and you must leave my farm immediately. All respectable people have long since surrendered, and it is only such people as you who continue the War, while you personally are one of the ringleaders of these rebels."

"Tut, tut," I said, "where is your husband?"

My husband is where all respectable people ought to be; with the English, of course."

"'Hands-uppers,' is that it?" answered my men in chorus, even Mooiroos the native joining in. "You deserve the D. S. O.," I said, "and if we meet the English we will mention it to them. Now go back to your house before these rebels and brigands give you your deserts."

She continued to pour out a flood of insults and imprecations on myself, the other generals, and the Government, and finally went away still muttering to herself. I could scarcely help comparing this patriotic lady to the one in Ermelo who had treated us so kindly. I encountered many more such incidents, and only mention these two in order to show the different views held at that time by our women on these matters, but in justice to our womenfolk I should add that this kind were only a small minority.

It was a bitterly cold night. Our blankets were very thin, and the wind continually scattered our fire and gave

us little opportunity of warming ourselves. There was no food for the horses except the grass. We haltered them close together, and each of us took it in turn to keep a watch, as we ran the risk at any moment of being surprised by the enemy, and as many in that district had turned traitors, we had to redouble our precautions. During the whole cold night I slept but little, and I fervently wished for the day to come, and felt exceedingly thankful when the sun arose and it got a little warmer.

Proceeding, we crossed the ridges east of Bethel, and as this village came in sight my groom Mooiroos exclaimed: "There are a lot of Khakis there, Baas."

I halted, and with my field-glasses could see distinctly the ememy's force, which was coming from Bethel in our direction, their scouts being visible everywhere to the right and left of the ridges. While we were still discussing what to do, the field-cornet of the district, a certain Jan Davel, dashed up with a score of burghers between us and the British. He informed me that the enemy's forces were coming from Brugspruit, and that he had scattered his burghers in all directions to prevent them organizing any resistance. The enemy's guns were now firing at us, and although the range was a long one the ridges in which we found ourselves were quite bare, and afforded us no cover.

We were therefore obliged to wheel to our right, and, proceeding to Klein Spionkop, we passed round the enemy along Vaalkop and Wilmansrust.

At Steenkoolspruit I met some burghers, who told me that the enemy had marched from Springs, near Boksburg, and were making straight for our commando at Kroomdraai. We managed to reach that place in the evening just in time to warn our men and be off. I left a section of my men behind to obstruct the advance of the enemy, whom they met the following day, but finding the force too strong were obliged to retire, and I do not know

exactly where they got to. At this time there were no less than nine of the enemy's columns in that district, and they all tried their level best to catch the Boers, but as the Boers also tried their best not to get caught, I am afraid the English were often disappointed. Here the reader will, perhaps, remark that it was not very brave to run away in this fashion, but one should also take our circumstances into consideration.

No sooner did we attack one column than we were attacked in our turn by a couple more, and had then considerable difficulty in effecting our escape. The enemy, moreover, had every advantage of us. They had plenty of guns, and could cut our ranks to pieces before we could approach sufficiently near to do any damage with our rifles; they far surpassed us in numerical strength; they had a constant supply of fresh horses—some of us had no horses at all; they had continual reinforcements; their troops were well fed, better equipped, and altogether in better condition. Small wonder, therefore, that the War had become a one-sided affair.

On the 20th of May, 1901, I seized an opportunity of attacking General Plumer on his way from Bethel to Standerton.

We had effected a junction with Commandant Mears and charged the enemy, and but for their having with them a number of Boer families we would have succeeded in capturing their whole laager. We had already succeeded in driving their infantry away from the waggons containing these families, when their infantry rushed in between and opened fire on us at 200 paces. We could do nothing else but return this fire, although it was quite possible that in doing so we wounded one or two of our own women and children. These kept waving their handkerchiefs to warn us not to fire, but it was impossible to resist the infantry's volleys without shooting. Meanwhile the cavalry

replaced their guns behind the women's waggons and fired on us from that coign of vantage.

Here we took 25 prisoners, 4,000 sheep and 10 horses. Our losses were two killed and nine wounded. The enemy left several dead and wounded on the field, as well as two doctors and an ambulance belonging to the Queensland Imperial Bushmen, which we sent back together with the prisoners we had taken.

On this occasion the English were spared a great defeat by having women and children in their laager, and no doubt for the sake of safety they kept these with them as long as possible. I do not insinuate that this was generally the case, and I am sure that Lord Kitchener or any other responsible commanding officer would loudly have condemned such tactics; but the fact remains that these unpleasant incidents occasionally took place.

About the beginning of June, 1901 (I find it difficult to be accurate without the aid of my notes) another violent effort was made to capture the members of the Government and the Commandant-General. Colonel Benson now appeared as the new "Boer-stalker," and after making several unsuccessful attempts to surround them almost captured the Government in the mountains between Piet Retief and Spitskop. Just as Colonel Benson thought he had them safe and was slowly but surely weaving his net around them—I believe this was at Halhangapase—the members of the Government left their carriages, and packing the most necessary articles and documents on their horses escaped in the night along a footpath which the enemy had kindly left unguarded and passed right through the British lines in the direction of Ermelo. On the following day the English, on closing their cordon, found, as they usually did, naught but the burned remains of some vehicles and a few lame mules.

Together with the late General Spruit, who happened

to be in that neighbourhood, I had been asked to march with a small commando to the assistance of the Government and the Commandant-General and we had started at once, only hearing when well on our way that they had succeeded in escaping.

We proceeded as far as the Bankop, not knowing where to find them, and it was no easy matter to look for them amongst the British columns.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A GOVERNMENT ON HORSEBACK.

FOR ten days we searched the neighbourhood, and finally met one of the Commandant-General's despatch-riders, who informed me of their whereabouts, which they were obliged to keep secret for fear of treachery. We met the whole party on William Smeet's farm near the Vaal River, every man on horseback or on a mule, without a solitary cart or waggon. It was a very strange sight to see the whole Transvaal Government on horseback. Some had not yet got used to this method of governing, and they had great trouble with their luggage, which was continually being dropped on the road.

General Spruit and myself undertook to escort the Executive Council through the Ermelo district, past Bethel to Standerton, where they were to meet the members of the Orange Free State Government. I had now with me only 100 men, under Field-Cornet R. D. Young; the remainder I had left behind near Bethel in charge of General Muller and Commandants Viljoen and Groenwald, with instructions to keep on the alert and to fall on any column that ventured a little ahead of the others.

It was whilst on my way back to them that a burgher brought me a report from General Muller, informing me that the previous night, assisted by Commandants W. Viljoen and Groenwald, he had with 130 men stormed one of the enemy's camps at Wilmansrust, capturing the whole after a short resistance on the enemy's part, but sustaining a loss of six killed and some wounded. The camp had been

under the command of Colonel Morris, and its garrison numbered 450 men belonging to the 5th Victorian Mounted Rifles. About 60 of these were killed and wounded, and the remainder were disarmed and released. Our haul consisted of two pom-poms, carts and waggons with teams in harness, and about 300 horses, the most miserable collection of animals I have ever seen. Here we also captured a well-known burgher, whose name, I believe, was Trotsky, and who was fighting with the enemy against us. He was brought before a court-martial, tried for high treason, and sentenced to death, which sentence was afterwards carried out.

Our Government received about this time a communication from General Brits, that the members of the Orange Free State Government had reached Blankop, north of Standerton, and would await us at Waterval. We hurried thither, and reached it in the evening of the 20th of June, 1901. Here we found President Steyn and Generals De Wet, De la Rey, and Hertzog, with an escort of 150 men. It was very pleasant to meet these great leaders again, and still more pleasing was the cordiality with which they received us. We sat round our fires all that night relating to each other our various adventures. Some which caused great fun and amusement, and some which brought tears even to the eyes of the hardened warrior. General De Wet was then suffering acutely from rheumatism, but he showed scarcely any trace of his complaint, and was as cheerful as the rest of us.

Next day we parted, each going separately on our way. We had decided what each of us was to do, and under this agreement I was to return to the Lydenburg and Middelburg districts, where we had already had such a narrow escape. I confess I did not care much about this, but we had to obey the Commandant-General, and there was an end of it. Meanwhile, reports came in that on the

other side of the railway the burghers who had been left behind were surrendering day by day, and that a field-cornet was engaged in negotiations with the enemy about a general laying down of arms. I at once despatched General Muller there to put an end to this.

We now prepared once more to cross the railway line, which was guarded more carefully than ever, and no one dared to cross with a conveyance of any description. We had, however, become possessed of a laager—a score of waggons and two pom-poms—and I determined to take these carts and guns across with me, for my men valued them all the more for having been captured. They were, in fact, as sweet to us as stolen kisses, although I have had no very large experience of the latter commodity.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

BLOWING UP AN ARMOURED TRAIN.

WE approached the line between Balmoral and Brugspruit, coming as close to it as was possible with regard to safety, and we stopped in a "dunk" (hollow place) intending to remain there until dusk before attempting to cross. The blockhouses were only 1,000 yards distant from each other, and in order to take our waggons across there was but one thing to be done, namely, to storm two blockhouses, overpower their garrisons, and take our convoy across between these two. Fortunately there were no obstacles here in the shape of embankments or excavations, the line being level with the veldt. We moved on in the evening (the 27th of June), the moon shining brightly, which was very unfortunate for us, as the enemy would see us and hear us long before we came within range. I had arranged that Commandant Groenwald was to storm the blockhouse on the right, and Commandant W. Viljoen that to the left, each with 75 men. We halted about 1,000 paces from the line, and here the sections left their horses behind and marched in scattered order towards the blockhouses. The enemy had been warned by telephone that morning of our vicinity, and all the pickets and outposts along the line were on the "qui vive." When 150 yards from the blockhouses the garrison opened fire on our men, and a hail of Lee-Metford bullets spread over a distance of about four miles, the British soldiers firing from within the blockhouses and from behind mounds of earth. The blockhouse attacked by Commandant

Viljoen offered the most determined resistance for about twenty minutes, but our men thrust their rifles through the loopholes of the blockhouses and fired within, calling out "hands-up" all the time, whilst the "Tommies" within retorted, You haven't V. M. R.'s to deal with this time!" However, we soon made it too hot for them and their boasting was exchanged into cries for mercy, but not before three of our men had been killed and several wounded. The "Tommies" now shouted: "We surrender, Sir; for God's sake stop firing." My brave field-cornet, G. Mybergh, who was closest to the blockhouses, answered: „All right then, come out." The "Tommies" answered: "Right, we are coming," and we ceased firing.

Field-Cornet Mybergh now stepped up to the entrance of the fort, but when he reached it a shot was fired from the inside and he fell mortally wounded in the stomach. At the same time the soldiers ran out holding up their hands. Our burghers were enraged beyond measure at this act of treachery, but the sergeant and the men swore by all that was sacred that it had been an accident, and that a gun had gone off spontaneously whilst being thrown down. The soldier who admitted firing the fatal shot was crying like a baby and kissing the hands of his victim. We held a short consultation amongst the officers and decided to accept his explanation of the affair. I was much upset, however, by this loss of one of the bravest officers I have ever known.

Meanwhile the fight at the other blockhouse continued. Commandant Groenwald afterwards informed me that he had approached the blockhouse and found it built of rock; it was, in fact, a fortified ganger's house built by the Netherlands South Africa Railway Company. He did not see any way of taking the place; many of his men had fallen, and an armoured train with a search-light was approaching from Brugspruit. On the other side of the

blockhouse we found a ditch about three feet deep and two feet wide. Hastily filling this up we let the carts go over. As the fifth one had got across and the sixth was standing on the lines, the armoured train came dashing at full speed in our midst. We had no dynamite to blow up the line, and although we fired on the train, it steamed right up to where we were crossing, smashing a team of mules and splitting us up into two sections. Turning the search-light on us, the enemy opened fire on us with rifles, Maxims and guns, firing grape-shot. Commandant Groenwald had to retire along the unconquered blockhouse, and managed somehow to get through. The majority of the burghers had already crossed and fled, whilst the remainder hurried back with a pom-pom and the other carts. I did not expect that the train would come so close to us, and was seated on my horse close to the surrendered blockhouse when it pulled up abruptly not four paces from me. The searchlight made the surroundings as light as day, and revealed the strange spectacle of the burghers, on foot and on horseback, fleeing in all directions and accompanied by cattle and waggons, whilst many dead lay on the veldt. However, we saved everything with the exception of a waggon and two carts, one of which unfortunately was my own. Thus for the fourth time in the war I lost all my worldly belongings, my clothes, my rugs, my food, my money.

My two commandants were now south of the line with half the men, whilst I was north of it with the other half. We buried our dead next morning and that evening I sent a message to the remainder of the commandos, telling them to cross the line at Uitkijk Station, south-west of Middelburg, whilst Captain Hindon was to lay a mine under the line near the station to blow up any armoured train coming down. Here we managed to get the rest of our laager over without much trouble.

The "Tommies" fired furiously from the blockhouses and our friend the armoured train was seen approaching from Middelburg, whistling a friendly warning to us. It came full speed as before, but only got to the spot where the mine had been laid for it. There was a loud explosion; something went up in the air and then the shrill whistle stopped and all was silent.

The next morning we were all once more camped together at Rooihoogte.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

TRAPPING PRO-BRITISH BOERS.

IN the month of July, 1901, we found ourselves once more on the scene of our former struggles, and were joined here by General Muller, who had completed his mission south of the railway. This district having been scoured for three weeks by thirty thousand English soldiers, who had carefully removed and destroyed everything living or dead, one can imagine the conditions under which we had to exist. No doubt from a strategical point of view the enemy could not be expected to do otherwise than devastate the country, but what grieved us most was the great amount of suffering this entailed to our women and children. Often the waggons in which these were being carried to imprisonment in the Concentration Camps were upset by the unskilful driving of the soldiers or their kaffir servants, and many women and children were injured in this way.

Moreover, a certain Mrs. Lindeque was killed by an English bullet near Roos Senekal, the soldiers saying that she had passed through the outposts against instructions. Small wonder, therefore, that many of our women-folk fled with their children at the enemy's approach, leaving all their worldly possessions behind to fall a prey to the general destruction. We often came across such families in the greatest distress, some having taken shelter in caves, and others living in huts roughly constructed of half burnt corrugated iron amongst the charred ruins of their former happy homes. The sufferings of our half-clad and hunger

burghers were small compared to the misery and privations of these poor creatures. Their husbands and other relations, however, made provision for them to the best of their ability, and these families were, in spite of all, comparatively happy, so long as they were able to remain amongst their own people.

Our commandos were now fairly exhausted, and our horses needed a rest very badly, the wanderings of the previous few weeks having reduced them to a miserable condition. I therefore left General Muller near the cobalt mines on the Upper Olifant's River, just by the waggon drift, whilst I departed with 100 men and a pom-pom to Witpoort and Windhoek, there to collect my scattered burghers and reorganise my diminished commando, as well as to look after our food supplies. At Witpoort the burghers who had been under the late Field-Cornet Kruge, and had escaped the enemy's sweeping movements, had repaired the mill which the English had blown up, and this was now working as well as before. A good stock of mealies had been buried there, and had remained undiscovered, and we were very thankful to the "bush-lancers" for this bounty.

Still, things were not altogether "honey." Matters were rather in a critical state, as treachery was rampant, and many burghers were riding to and fro to the enemy and arranging to surrender, the faithful division being powerless to prevent them. We hat to act with great firmness and determination to put a stop to these tendencies and within a week of our arrival half a dozen persons had been incarcerated in Roos Senekal gaol under a charge of high treason. Moreover we effected a radical change in leadership, discharging old and war-sick officers and placing younger and more energetic men in command.

Several families here were causing considerable trouble. When first the enemy had passed through their district

they had no opportunity of surrendering with their cattle. But when the English returned, they had attempted to go to the enemy's camp at Belfast, taking all their cattle and moveables with them. At this the loyal burghers were furious and threatened to confiscate all their cattle and goods. Seeing this, these families, whom I shall call the Steenkamps, had desisted from their attempt to go over to the enemy and had taken up their abode in a church at Dullstroom, the only building which had not been destroyed, although the windows, doors and pulpit had long disappeared. Here they quietly awaited an opportunity of surrendering to the enemy, whose camp at Belfast was only 10 or 12 miles distant. We were very anxious that their cattle and sheep, of which they had a large number, should not go to the enemy, but we could bring no charge of treachery home to them, as they were very smooth tongued scoundrels and always swore fealty to us.

I have mentioned this as an example of the dangerous elements with which we had to contend amongst our own people, and to show how low a Boer may sink when once he has decided to forego his most sacred duties and turn against his own countrymen the weapon he had lately used in their defence. Such men were luckily in the minority. Yet I often came across cases where fathers fought against their own sons, and brother against brother. I cannot help considering that it was far from noble on the part of our enemy to employ such traitors to their country and to form such bodies of scoundrels as the National Scouts.

Amongst all this worry of reorganising our commandos and weeding out the traitors we were allowed little rest by the enemy, and once we suddenly found them marching up from Helvetia in our direction. A smart body of men, chiefly composed of Lydenburg and Middelburg men, and

under the command of a newly-appointed officer, Captain Du Toit, went to meet the enemy between Bakendorp and Dullstroom. Here ensued a fierce fight, where we lost some men, but succeeded in arresting the enemy's progress. The fight, however, was renewed the next day, and the British having received strong reinforcements our burghers were forced to retire, the enemy remaining at a place near the "Pannetjes," three miles from Dullstroom.

The English camp was now close to our friends, the Steenkamps, who were anxiously waiting an opportunity to become "handsuppers." They had, of course, left off fighting long ago, one complaining that he had a disease of the kidneys, another that he suffered from some other complaint. They would sit on the kopjes and watch the fighting and the various manœuvres, congratulating each other when the enemy approached a little nearer to them.

I will now ask the reader's indulgence to describe one of our little practical jokes enacted at Dullstroom Church, which was characteristic of many other similar incidents in the campaign. It will be seen how these would-be "hands-uppers" were caught in a little trap prepared by some officers of my staff.

My three adjutants, Bester, Redelinghuisen, and J. Viljoen, carefully dressed in as much "khaki" as they could collect, and parading respectively as Colonels Bullock, "Jack," and "Cooper," all of His Majesty's forces, proceeded one fine evening to Dullstroom Church, to ascertain if the Steenkamps would agree to surrender and fight under the British flag. They arrived there about 9 p. m., and finding that the inmates had all gone to sleep, loudly knocked at the door. This was opened by a certain youthful Mr. Van der Nest, who was staying in the church for the night with his brother. J. Viljoen, alias "Cooper," and acting as interpreter between the pseudo-English and the renegade Boers, addressed the young man in this fashion:—

"Good evening! Is Mr. Steenkamp in? Here is a British officer who wishes to see him and his brother-in-law."

Van der Nest turned pale, and hurried inside, and stammering, "Oom Jan, there are some people at the door," woke up his brother and both decamped out of the back door. Steenkamp's brother-in-law, however, whom I will call Roux, soon made his appearance and bowing cringingly, said with a smile: —

"Good evening, gentlemen; good evening."

The self-styled Colonel Bullock, addressing "Cooper," the interpreter, said: "Tell Mr. Roux that we have information that he and his brother wish to surrender."

As soon as "Cooper" began to interpret, Roux answered in broken English, "Yes, sir, you are quite right; myself and my brother-in-law have been waiting twelve months for an opportunity to surrender, and we are so thankful now that we are able to do so."

"Colonel Bullock": "Very well, then; call your people out!"

Roux bowed low, and ran back into the church, presently issuing with three comrades, who all threw down their arms and made abeyance.

The "Colonel": "Are these men able to speak English?"

Roux: "No, sir."

The "Colonel": "Ask them if they are willing to surrender voluntarily to His Majesty the King of Great Britain?"

The burghers, in chorus: "Yes, sir; thank you very much. We are so pleased that you have come at last. We have wished to surrender for a long time, but the Boers would not let us get through. We have not fought against you, sir."

The "Colonel": "Very well; now deliver up all your arms."

And whilst the pseudo-colonel pretended to be busy making notes the burghers brought out their Mausers and

cartridge-belts, handing them over to the masquerading "Tommies."

Roux next said to the "Colonel": "Please, sir, may I keep this revolver? There are a few Hollanders in the hut yonder who said they would shoot me if I surrendered; and you know, sir, that it is these Hollanders who urge the Boers to fight and prolong the War. Why don't you go and catch them? I will show you where they are."

Resisting an impulse to put a bullet through the traitor's head, the "Colonel" answered briefly: "Very well, keep your revolver. I will catch the Hollanders early to-morrow."

Roux: "Be careful, sir; Ben Viljoen is over there with a commando and a pom-pom."

The „Colonel" (haughtily): "Be at ease; my column will soon be round him and he will not escape this time."

The women-folk now came out to join the party. They clapped their hands in joy and invited the "Colonel" and his men to come in and have some coffee.

The "Colonel" graciously returned thanks. Meanwhile a woman had whispered to Roux: "I hope these are not Ben Viljoen's people making fools of us."

"Nonsense," he answered, "Can't you see that this is a very superior British officer? Whereat the whole company further expressed their delight at seeing them.

The "Colonel" now spoke: "Mr. Roux, we will take your cattle and sheep with us for safety. Kindly lend us a servant to help drive them along. Will you show us to-morrow where the Boers are?"

Mr. Roux: "Certainly, sir, but you must not take me into dangerous places, please."

The "Colonel": „Very well; I will send the waggons to fetch your women-folk in the morning."

Roux gathered together his cattle and said: "I hope you and I shall have a whiskey together in your camp to-morrow.'

The "Colonel" answered: "I shall be pleased to see you," and asked them if they had any money or valuables they wished taken care of. But the Boers, true to the saying, "Touch a Boer's heart rather than his purse," answered in chorus: "Thank you, but we have put all that carefully away where no Boer will find it."

They all bid the "Colonel" good-bye, the "Tommies" exchanging some familiarities with the women till these screamed with laughter, and then the "Colonel" and his commando of two men remounted their big clumsy English horses and rode proudly away. But pride comes before a fall, and they had not proceeded many yards when the "Colonel's" horse, stumbling over a bundle of barbed wire, fell, and threw his rider to the ground. Just as he had nearly exhausted the Dutch vocabulary of imprecations, the Steenkamps, who fortunately had not heard him, came to his assistance and with many expressions of sympathy helped him on his horse, Roux carefully wiping his leggings clean with his handkerchief. After proceeding a little further the "Tommies" asked their "Colonel" what he meant by that acrobatic performance. Whereat the "Colonel" answered: "That was a very fortunate accident; the Steenkamps are now convinced that we are English by the clumsy manner I rode."

The next morning my three adjutants arrived in camp carrying four new Mausers and 100 cartridges each, and driving about 300 sheep and a nice pony. The same morning I sent Field-Cornet Young to arrest the brave quartette of burghers. He found everything packed in readiness to depart to the English camp, and they were anxiously awaiting Colonel Bullock's promised waggons.

It was, of course, a fine "tableau" when the curtain rose on the farce, disclosing in the place of the expected English rescuers a burgher officer with a broad smile on his face. They were, of course, profuse in their apologies

and excuses. They declared that they had been surrounded by hundreds of the enemy who had placed their rifles to their breasts, forcing them to surrender. One of them was now in so pitiable a condition of fear that he showed the field-cornet a score of certificates from doctors and quacks of all sorts, declaring him to be suffering from every imaginable disease, and the field-cornet was moved to leave him behind. The other three were placed under arrest, court-martialled and sentenced to three months' hard labour, and to have all their goods confiscated.

Two days later the English occupied Dullstroom, and the pseudo-invalid and the women, minus their belongings, were taken care of by the enemy, as they had wished.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

BRUTAL KAFFIRS' MURDER TRAIL.

AT Windhoek we were again attacked by an English column. The reader will probably be getting weary of these continual attacks, and I hasten to assure him that we were far more weary than he can ever grow. On the first day of the fight we succeeded in forcing back the enemy, but on the second day, the fortunes of war were changed and after a fierce fight, in which I had the misfortune to lose a brave young burgher named Botha, we gave up arguing the matter with our foes and retired.

The enemy followed us up very closely, and although I used the sjambok freely amongst my men I could not persuade them, not even by this un-gentle method, to make a stand against their foes, and as we passed Witpoort the enemy's cavalry with two guns was close at our heels.

Not until the burghers had reached Maagschuur, between the Bothas and Tautesbergen, would they condescend to make a stand and check the enemy's advance. Here after a short but sharp engagement, we forced them to return to Witpoort, where they pitched camp.

Our mill, which I have previously mentioned as being an important source of our food supply, was again burned to the ground.

Our commandos returned to Olifant's River and at the cobalt mine near there joined those who had remained behind under General Muller. The enemy, however, who seemed determined, if possible, to obliterate us from the

earth's surface, discovered our whereabouts about the middle of July, and attacked us in overwhelming numbers. We had taken up a position on the "Randts," and offered as much resistance as we could. The enemy poured into us a heavy shell fire from their howitzers and 15-pounders, while their infantry charged both our extreme flanks. After losing many men, a battalion of Highlanders succeeded in turning our left flank, and once having gained this advantage, and aided by their superior numbers, the enemy were able to take up position after position, and finally rendered it impossible to offer any further resistance. Late in the afternoon, with a loss of five wounded and one man killed—an Irish-American, named Wilson—we retired through the Olifant's River, near Mazeppa Drift, the enemy staying the night at Wagendrift, about three miles further up the stream. The following morning they forded the river, and proceeded through Poortjesnek and Donkerhoek, to Pretoria, thus allowing us a little breathing space. I now despatched some reliable burghers to report our various movements to the Commandant-General, and to bring news of the other commandos. It was three weeks before these men returned, for they had on several occasions been prevented from crossing the railway line, and they finally only succeeded in doing so under great difficulties. They reported that the English on the high veldt were very active and numerous.

About the middle of July, I left General Muller to take a rest with the commando, and accompanied by half a score of adjutants and despatch riders, proceeded to Pilgrimsrust in the Lydenburg district to visit the commandos there, and allay as much as I could the dissatisfaction caused by my reorganisation.

At Zwagerhoek, a kloof some 12 miles south of Lydenburg, through which the waggon track leads from Lydenburg to Dullstroom, I found a field-cornet with about

57 men. Having discussed the situation with them and explained matters, they were all satisfied.

Here I appointed as field-cornet a young man of 23 years of age, a certain J. S. Schoenman, who distinguished himself subsequently by his gallant behaviour.

We had barely completed our arrangements when we were again attacked by one of the enemy's columns from Lydenburg. At first we successfully defended ourselves, but at last were compelled to give way.

I do not believe we caused the enemy any considerable losses, but we had no casualties. The same night we proceeded through the enemy's line to Houtboschloop, five miles east of Lydenburg, where a small commando was situated, and having to proceed a very roundabout way, we covered that night no less than 40 miles.

Another meeting of all burghers north of Lydenburg was now convened, to be held at a ruined hotel some 12 miles west of Nelspruit Station, which might have been considered the centre of all the commandos in that district. I found that these were divided into two parties, one of which was dissatisfied with the new order of things I had arranged and desired to re-instate their old officers, while the other was quite pleased with my arrangements. The latter party was commanded by Mr. Piet Moll, whom I had appointed commandant instead of Mr. D. Schoeman, who formerly used to occupy that position. At the gathering I explained matters to them and tried to persuade the burghers to be content with their new commandants. It was evident, however, that many were not to be satisfied and that they were not to be expected to work harmoniously together. I therefore decided to let both commandants keep their positions and to let the men follow whichever one they chose, and I took the first opportunity of making an attack on the enemy so as to test the efficiency of these two bodies.

Taking the two commandos with their respective two commandants in an easterly direction to Wit River, we camped there for a few days and scouted for the enemy on the Delagoa Bay Railway, so as to find out the best spot to attack. We had just decided to attack Crocodil-poort Station in the evening of the 1st August, when our scouts reported that the English, who had held the fort at M'pisana's Stad, between our laager in Wit River and Leydsdorp, were moving in the direction of Komati Poort with a great quantity of captured cattle.

Our first plan was therefore abandoned and I ordered 50 burghers of each commando to attack this column at M'pisana's fort at once, as they had done far too much harm to be allowed to get away unmolested. They were a group of men called "Steinacker's Horse", a corps formed of all the desperadoes and vagabonds to be scraped together from isolated places in the north, including kaffir store-keepers, smugglers, spies, and scoundrels of every descrip-tion, the whole commanded by a character of the name of————. Who or what this gentleman was I have never been able to discover, but judging by his work and by the men under him, he must have been a second Musolino. This corps had its headquarters at Komati Poort under Major Steinacker, to whom was probably entrusted the task of guarding the Portuguese frontier, and he must have been given *carte blanche* as regards his mode of operation.

From all accounts the primary occupation of this corps appeared to be looting, and the kaffirs attached to it were used for scouting, fighting, and worse. Many families in the northern part of Lydenburg had been attacked in lonely spots, and on one occasion the white men on one of these marauding expeditions had allowed the kaffirs to murder ten defenceless people with their assegais and hatchets, capturing their cattle and other property. In like manner were massacred the relatives of Commandants

Lombard, Vermaak, Rodolf and Stoltz, and doubtless many others who were not reported to me. The reader will now understand my anxiety to put some check on these lawless brigands. The instructions to the commando which I had sent out, and which would reach M'pisana's in two days, were briefly, to take the fort and afterwards do as circumstances dictated. If my men failed they would have the desperadoes pursue them on their swift horses, and all the kaffir tribes would conspire against us, so that none would escape on our side. A kaffir was generally understood to be a neutral person in this War, and unless found armed within our lines, with no reasonable excuse for his presence, we generally left him alone. They were, however, largely used as spies against us, keeping to their kraals in the daytime and issuing forth at night to ascertain our position and strength. They also made good guides for the English troops, who often had not the faintest idea of the country in which they were. It must not be forgotten that when a kaffir is given a rifle he at once falls a prey to his brutal instincts, and his only amusement henceforth becomes to kill without distinction of age, colour, or sex. Several hundreds of such natives, led by white men, were roaming about in this district, and all that was captured, plundered or stolen was equally divided among them 25 per cent, being first deducted for the British Government.

I have indulged in this digression in order to describe another phase with which we had to contend in our struggle for existence. I have reason to believe, however, that the British Commander-in-Chief, for whom I have always had the greatest respect, was not at that time aware of the remarkable character of these operations, carried on as they were in the most remote parts of the country; and there is no doubt that had he been aware of their true character he would have speedily brought these miscreants to justice.

CHAPTER XL.

CAPTURING A FREEBOOTER'S LAIR.

EARLY in the morning of the 6th of August, as the breaking dawn was tinting the tops of the Lebombo Mountains with its purple dye, and the first rays of the rising sun shed a golden light over the sombre bushveldt, the commando under Commandants Moll and Schoeman were slowly approaching the dreaded M'pisana's fort. When within a few hundred paces of it they left the horses behind and slowly crept up to it in scattered order; for as none of us knew the arrangement or construction of the place, it had been arranged to advance very cautiously and to charge suddenly on the blowing of a whistle. Nothing was stirring in the fort as we approached, and we began to think that the garrison had departed; but when barely 70 yards from it the officers noticed some forms moving about in the trenches, which encompassed it. The whistle was blown and the burghers charged, a cheer rising from a hundred throats. Volley after volley was discharged from the trenches, but our burghers rushed steadily on, jumped into the trenches themselves and drove the defenders into the fort through secret passages. The English now began firing on us through loopholes in the walls and several of our men had fallen, when Commandant Moll shouted, "Jump over the wall!" A group of burghers rushed at the 12-foot wall, and attempted to scale it; but a heavy fire was directed on them and seven burghers, including the valiant Commandant Moll, fell severely wounded. Nothing daunted, Captain Malan, who was next in

command of the division, urged his men to go on, and most of them succeeded in jumping into the fort, where, after a desperate resistance, in which Captain ————, their leader, fell mortally wounded, the whole band surrendered to us. Our losses were six burghers killed, whilst Commandant Moll and 12 others were severely wounded. The burghers found one white man killed in the fort, and two wounded, whilst a score of kaffirs lay wounded and dead. We took 24 white prisoners and about 50 kaffirs. I repeat that the whites were the lowest specimens of humanity that one can possibly imagine.

Hardly was the fight over and our prisoners disarmed when a sentry we had posted on the wall called out:

"Look out, there is a kaffir commando coming!"

It was, in fact, a strong kaffir commando, headed by the chief M'pisana himself, who had come to the rescue of his friends of Steinacker's Horse. They opened fire on us at about 100 yards, and the burghers promptly returned their greeting, bowling over a fair number of them, at which the remainder retired.

Alongside the fort were about 20 small huts, in which we found a number of kaffir girls. On being asked who they were, they repeated that they were the "missuses" of the white soldiers. Inside the captured fort we found many useful articles, and the official books of this band. They contained systematic entries of what had been plundered, looted and stolen on their marauding expeditions and showed how they had been divided amongst themselves, deducting 25 per cent, for the British Government.

A long and extensive correspondence now took place about this matter between myself and Lord Kitchener. I wished first to know whether the gang was a recognised part of the British Army, as otherwise I should have to treat them as ordinary brigands. After some delay Lord Kitchener answered that they were a part of His Majesty's

Army. I then wished to know if he would undertake to try the men for their misdeeds, but this was refused. This correspondence ultimately led to a meeting between General Bindon Blood and myself, which was held at Lydenburg on the 27th August, 1901.

The captured kaffirs were tried by court-martial and each punished according to his deserts. The 24 Englishmen were handed over to the enemy, after having given their word of honour not to return to their barbarous life. How far this promise was kept I do not know; but from the impression they made upon me I do not think they had much idea of what honour meant. The captured cattle which we had hoped to find at the fort had been sent away to Komati Poort a few days before our attack and according to their "books" must have numbered about 4,000 heads. Another section of this notorious corps met with a like fate about this time at Bremersdorp in Swaziland. They did not there offer such a determined resistance, and the Ermelo burghers captured two good Colt-Maxims and two loads of ammunition probably intended for Swaziland natives.

CHAPTER XLI.

AMBUSHING THE HUSSARS.

ON August 10th, shortly after our arrival with the prisoners-of-war at Sabi, and while I was still discussing with Lord Kitchener the incident related in the previous chapter, General Muller sent word to me from Olifant's River, where I had left him with my men, that he had been attacked by General W. Kitchener three days after I had left him. It appears that his sentries were surprised and cut off from the commandos, these being divided into different camps.

The burghers who were farthest away, the Middelburg and Johannesburg men, had, contrary to my instructions, pitched camp on the Blood River, near Rooikraal, and were suddenly and unexpectedly attacked by the enemy at about two o'clock in the afternoon, whilst their horses were grazing in the veldt. Some horses were caught in time and some burghers offered a little resistance, firing at a short range, several men being killed on both sides. The confusion, however, was indescribable, horses, cattle, burghers and soldiers being all mixed up together. A pom-pom, together with its team of mules and harness, and most of the carts and saddles, were captured by the enemy. Our officers could not induce the men to make a determined stand until they had retired to the Mazeppa Drift, on the Olifant's River. Here General Muller arrived in the night with some reinforcements and awaited the enemy, who duly appeared next morning with a division of the 18th and 19th Hussars, and, encouraged by the

previous day's success, charged our men with a well-directed fire which wrought havoc in their ranks. The gallant Hussars were repulsed in one place, and, at another Major Davies (or Davis) and 20 men were made prisoners. At last some guns and reinforcements reached the enemy, and our burghers wisely retired, going as far as Eland's River, near the "Double Drifts," where they rested.

On the third day General W. Kitchener had discovered our whereabouts, and our sentries gave us warning that the enemy was approaching through the bushes, raising great clouds of dust. While the waggons were being got ready the burghers marched out, and awaited the English in a convenient spot between two kopjes. The latter rode on unsuspectingly two by two, and when about 100 had been allowed to pass, our men rushed out, calling, "Hands up!" and, catching hold of their horses' bridles, disarmed about 30 men. This caused an immediate panic, and most of the Hussars fled (closely pursued by our burghers, who shot 10 or 12 of them). The Hussars left behind a Colt-Maxim and a heliograph for our usage. The ground was overgrown here with a prickly, thorny bush, which made it difficult for our foes to escape, and about 20 more were overtaken and caught, several having been dragged from their horses by protruding branches, and with their face and hands badly injured by thorns, whilst their clothes were half torn off their bodies.

Meanwhile the enemy continued to fire on us whilst retreating, and thus succeeded in wounding several of their own people. This running fight lasted until late in the evening, when the burghers slackened off their pursuit and returned, their losses being only one killed, Lieut. D. Smit, of the Johannesburg Police. The enemy's losses were considerable, although one could not estimate the exact number, as the dead were scattered over a large tract of ground and hidden amongst the bushes, rendering

it difficult to find them. Weeks afterwards, when we returned over the same ground, we still found some bodies lying about the bush, and gave them decent burial.

Our burghers were now once more in possession of 100 fresh horses and saddles, whilst their pom-pom was replaced by a Colt-Maxim. General W. Kitchener now left us alone for a while, for which relief we were very thankful, and fell back on the railway line. The respite, however, was short-lived; soon fresh columns were seen coming up from Middelburg and Pretoria, and we were again attacked, some fighting taking place mostly on our old battlefields. General Muller repeatedly succeeded in tearing up the railway line and destroying trains with provisions, whilst I had the good fortune of capturing a commissariat train, near Modelane, on the Delagoa Bay line; but, as I could not remove the goods, I was forced to burn the whole lot. A train, apparently with reinforcements, was also blown up, the engine and carriages going up in the air with fine effect.

CHAPTER XLII.

I TALK WITH GENERAL BLOOD.

ABOUT the end of August, 1901, I met General Sir Bindon Blood at Lydenburg by appointment. We had arranged to discuss several momentous questions there, as we made little progress by correspondence. In the first place, we accused the English of employing barbarous kaffir tribes against us; in the second place, of abusing the usage of the white flag by repeatedly sending officers through our lines with seditious proclamations which we would not recognise, and we could only obey our own Government and not theirs; in the third place, we complained of their sending our women with similar proclamations to us from the Concentration Camps and making them solemnly promise to do all that they could to induce their husbands to surrender and thus regain their liberty. This we considered was a rather mean device on the part of our powerful enemy. There were also other minor questions to discuss with regard to the Red Cross.

I went into the English line accompanied by my adjutants, Nel and Bedeluighuis, and my secretary, Lieutenant W. Malan. At Potloodspruit, four miles from Lydenburg, I met General Blood's chief staff officer, who conducted us to him. At the entrance of the village a guard of honour had been placed and received us with military honours. I could not understand the meaning of all this fuss, especially as the streets through which we passed were lined with all sorts of spectators, and to my great discomfort I found myself the chief object of this

interest. On every side I heard the question asked, "Which is Viljoen?" and, on my being pointed out, I often caught the disappointed answer, "Is that him?" "By Jove, he looks just like other people". They had evidently expected to see a new specimen of mankind.

In the middle of the village we halted before a small, neat house, which I was told was General Blood's headquarters. The General himself met us on the threshold; a well-proportioned, kindly-looking man about 50 years of age, evidently a genuine soldier and an Irishman, as I soon detected by his speech. He received us very courteously, and as I had little time at my disposal, we at once entered into our discussion. It would serve little purpose to set down all the details of our interview, especially as nothing final was decided, since whatever the General said was subject to Lord Kitchener's approval, whilst I myself had to submit everything to my Commandant-General. General Blood promised, however, to stop sending out the women with their proclamations, and also the officers on similar missions, and the Red Cross question, was also satisfactorily settled. The kaffir question, however, was left unsettled, although General Blood promised to warn the kaffir tribes round Lydenburg not to interfere in the War and not to leave the immediate vicinity of their kraals. (Only the night before two burghers named Swart had been murdered at Doorukoek by some kaffirs, who pretended to have done this by order of the English). The interview lasted about an hour, and besides us two, Colonel Curran and my secretary, Lieutenant Malan, were present. General Blood and his staff conducted us as far as Potloodspruit, where we took leave. The white flag was replaced by the rifle, and we returned to our respective duties.

CHAPTER XLIII.

MRS. BOTHA'S BABY AND THE "TOMMY."

IN September, 1901, after having organized the commandos north of Lydenburg, I went back with my suite to join my burghers at Olifant's River, which I reached at the beginning of September. The enemy had left General Muller alone after the affair with the Hussars. Reports were coming in from across the railway informing us that much fighting was going on in the Orange Free State and Cape Colony, and that the burghers were holding their own. This was very satisfactory news to us, especially as we had not received any tidings for over a month. I again sent in a report to our Commandant-General relating my adventures.

We had much difficulty in getting the necessary food for the commandos, the enemy having repeatedly crossed the country between Roos Senekal, Middelburg, and Rhenosterkop, destroying and ravaging everything. I therefore resolved to split up my forces, the corps known by the name of the "Rond Commando" taking one portion through the enemy's lines to Pilgrimsrust, North of Lydenburg, where food was still abundant. Fighting-General Muller was left behind with the Boksburg Police and the Middelburg Commando, the Johannesburg corps going with me to Pilgrim's Rest, where I had my temporary headquarters. We had plenty of mealies in this district and also enough cattle to kill, so that we could manage to subsist on these provisions. We had long since dispensed with tents, but the rains in the mountain regions

of Pilgrim's Rest and the Sabi had compelled us to find the burghers shelter. At the alluvial diggings at Pilgrim's Rest we found a great quantity of galvanized iron plates and deals, which, when cut into smaller pieces, could be used for building. We found a convenient spot in the mountains between Pilgrim's Rest and Kruger's Post, where some hundreds of iron or zinc huts were soon erected, affording excellent cover for the burghers.

Patrols were continually sent out round Lydenburg, and whenever possible we attacked the enemy, keeping him well occupied. We succeeded in getting near his outposts from time to time and occasionally capturing some cattle. This seemed to be very galling to the English, and towards the end of September we found they were receiving reinforcements at Lydenburg. This had soon become a considerable force, in fact in November they crossed the Spekboom River in great numbers, and at Kruger's Post came upon our outposts, when there was some fighting. The enemy did not go any further that night. The following day we had to leave these positions and the other side took them and camped there. Next day they moved along Ohrigstad River with a strong mounted force and a good many empty waggons, evidently to collect the womenfolk in that place. I had to proceed by a circuitous route in order to get ahead of the enemy. The road led across a steep mountain and through thickly grown kloofs, which prevented us from reaching the enemy until they had burnt all the houses, destroyed the seed plants, and loaded the families on their carts, after which they withdrew to the camp at Kruger's Post. We at once charged the enemy's rear-guard, and a heavy fight followed, which, however, was of short duration. The English fled, leaving some dead and wounded behind, also some dozens of helmets and "putties" which had got entangled in the trees. We also captured a waggon loaded with provisions

and things that had been looted, such as women's clothes and rugs, a case of Lee-Metford ammunition and a number of uniforms. Some days after the enemy tried to get through to Pilgrim's Rest, but had to retire before our rifle fire. They managed, however, to get to Roosenkrans, where a fight of only some minutes ensued, when they retired to Kruger's Post. They only stopped there for a few days, marching back to Lydenburg at night time just when we had carefully planned a night attack. We destroyed the Spekboom River bridge shortly after, thus preventing the enemy's return from Lydenburg to Kruger's Post in a single night. Although there is a drift through the river it cannot be passed in the dark without danger, especially with guns and carts, without which no English column will march. Every fortnight I personally proceeded with my adjutants through the enemy's lines near Lydenburg to see how the commando in the South were getting on and to arrange matters.

The month of November, 1901, passed without any remarkable incidents. We organized some expeditions to the Delagoa Bay Railway, but without much success, and during one of these the burghers succeeded in laying a mine near Hector's Spruit Station during the night. They were lying in ambush next day waiting for a train to come along when a "Tommy" went down the line and noticed some traces of the ground having been disturbed which roused his suspicions. He saw the mine and took the dynamite out. Two burghers who were lying in the long grass shouted "Hands up." Tommy threw his rifle down and with his hands up in the air ran up to the burghers saying, before they could speak, "I say, did you hear the news that Mrs. Botha gave birth to a son in Europe?"

They could not help laughing, and the "Tommy," looking very innocent, answered:

"I am not telling you a lie."

One of the burghers coaxed him by telling him they did not doubt his word, only the family news had come so prematurely.

"Well," returned "Tommy," "Oi thought you blokes would be interested in your boss's family, that's why I spoke."

The courteous soldier was sent back with instructions to get some better clothes, for those he had on his back were all torn and dirty and they were not worth taking.

The expedition was now a failure, for the enemy had been warned and the sentries were doubled along the line.

In December, 1901, we tried an attack on a British convoy between Lydenburg and Machadodorp. I took a mounted commando and arrived at Schvemones Cleft after four days' marching through the Sabinek via Cham Sham, an arduous task, as we had to go over the mountains and through some rivers. Some of my officers went out scouting in order to find the best place for an attack on the convoy. The enemy's blockhouses were found to be so close together on the road along which the convoy had to pass as to make it very difficult to get at it. But having come such a long way nobody liked to go back without having at least made an effort. We therefore marched during the night and found some hiding places along the road where we waited, ready to charge anything coming along. At dawn next day I found the locality to be very little suitable for the purpose we had in view, but if we were now to move the enemy would notice our presence from the block-houses. We would, therefore, either have to lie low till dusk or make an attack after all. We had already captured several of the enemy's spies, whom we kept prisoners so as not to be betrayed. Towards the afternoon the convoy came by and we charged on horseback. The English, who must have seen us coming, were ready to receive our charge and poured a heavy fire into us from ditches and

trenches and holes in the ground. We managed to dislodge the enemy's outerflanks and to make several prisoners, but could not reach the carts on account of the heavy fire from a regiment of infantry escorting the waggons. I thought the taking of the convoy would cost more lives than it was worth, and gave orders to cease firing. We lost my brave adjutant, Jaapie Oliver, while Captain Giel Joubert and another burgher were wounded. On the other side Captain Merriman and ten men were wounded. I do not knew how many killed he had.

We went back to Schoeman's Kloof the same day, where we buried our comrades and attended to the wounded. The blockhouses and garrisons along the convoy road were now fortified with entrenchments and guns, and we had to abandon our plan of further attacks. It was raining fast all the time we were out on this expedition, which caused us serious discomfort. We had very few waterproofs, and, all the houses in the district having been burnt down, there was no shelter for man or beast. We slowly retired on Pilgrim's Rest, having to cross several swollen rivers.

On our arrival at Sabi I received the sad tidings that four burghers named Stoltz had been cruelly murdered by kaffirs at Witriver. Commandant Du Toit had gone there with a patrol and found the bodies in a shocking condition, plundered and cut to pieces with assegais, and, according to the trace, the murderers had come from Nelspruit Station.

Another report came from General Muller at Steenkampsberg. He informed me that he had stormed a camp during the night of the 16th December, but had been forced to retire after a fierce fight, losing 25 killed and wounded, amongst whom was the valiant Field-Cornet J. J. Kriege. The enemy's losses were also very heavy, being 31 killed and wounded, including Major Hudson.

It should not be imagined that we had to put up with very primitive arrangements in every respect. Where

we were now stationed, to the north of Lydenburg, we even had telephonic communication between Spitskop and Doornhoek, with call-offices at Saby and Pilgrim's Rest. The latter place is in the centre of the diggers' population here, and a moderate-sized village. There are a few hundred houses in it, and it is situated 30 miles north-east of Lydenburg. Here are the oldest goldfields known in South Africa, having been discovered in 1876. This village had so far been permanently in our possession. General Buller had been there with his force in 1900 but had not caused any damage, and the enemy had not returned since. The mines and big stamp-batteries were protected by us and kept in order by neutral persons under the management of Mr. Alex. Marshall. We established a hospital there under the supervision of Dr. A. Neethling. About forty families were still in residence and there was enough food, although it was only simple fare and not of great variety. Yet people seemed to be very happy and contented so long as they were allowed to live among their own people.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE LAST CHRISTMAS OF THE WAR.

DECEMBER, 1901, passed without any important incident. We only had a few insignificant outpost skirmishes with the British garrison at Witklip to the south of Lydenburg. Both belligerents in this district attempted to annoy each other as much as possible by blowing up each other's mills and storehouses. Two of the more adventurous spirits amongst my scouts, by name Jordaan and Mellema, succeeded in blowing up a mill in the Lydenburg district used by the British for grinding corn, and the enemy very soon retaliated by blowing up one of our mills at Pilgrim's Rest. As the Germans say, "*Alle gute dingen sind drei*". Several such experiences and the occasional capture of small droves of British cattle were all the incidents worth mentioning. It was in this comparatively quiet manner that the third year of our campaign came to a termination. The War was still raging and our lot was hard, but we did not murmur. We decided rather to extract as much pleasure and amusement out of the Christmas festivities as the extraordinary circumstances in which we found ourselves rendered possible.

The British for the time being desisted from troubling us, and our stock and horses being in excellent condition, we arranged to hold a sort of gymkhana on Christmas Day. In the sportive festivities of the day many interesting events took place. Perhaps the most noteworthy of these were a mule race, for which nine competitors entered, and a ladies' race, in which six fair pedestrians took part. The

spectacle of nine burly, bearded Boers urging their asinine steeds to top speed by shout and spur provoked quite as much honest laughter as any theatrical farce ever excited. We on the grand stand were but a shaggy and shabby audience, but we were in excellent spirits and cheered with tremendous gusto the enterprising jockey who won this remarkable "Derby". Shabby as we were, we subscribed £ 115 in prizes. After the sports I have just described the company retired to a little tin church at Pilgrim's Rest, and there made merry by singing hymns and songs round a little Christmas tree.

Later in the evening a magic-lantern, which we had captured from the British, was brought into play, and with this we regaled 90 of our juvenile guests. The building was crowded and the utmost enthusiasm reigned. The ceremony was opened by the singing of hymns and the making of speeches, a harmonium adding largely to the enjoyment of the evening. I felt somewhat nervous when called upon to address the gathering, for the children were accompanied by their mothers, and these stared at me with expectant eyes as if they would say, "See, the General is about to speak; his words are sure to be full of wisdom." I endeavoured to display great coolness, and I do not think I failed very markedly as an extemporaneous orator. I was helped very considerably in the speechmaking part of the programme by my good friends the Rev. Neethling and Mr. W. Barter, of Lydenburg. I have not now the slightest idea of what I spoke about except that I congratulated the little ones and their mothers on being preserved from the Concentration Camps, where so many of their friends were confined.

I have mentioned that there were young ladies with us who participated in the races. These were some whom the British had kindly omitted to place in the Concentration Camps, and it was remarkable to see how soon

certain youthful and handsome burghers entered into amorous relations with these young ladies, and matters developed so quickly that I was soon confronted with a very curious problem. We had no marriage officers handy, and I, as General, had not been armed with any special authority to act as such. Two blushing heroes came to me one morning accompanied by clinging, timorous young ladies, and declared that they had decided that since I was their General I had full authority to marry them. I was taken aback by this request, and asked, "Don't you think, young fellows, that under the circumstances you had better wait a little till after the termination of the war?" "Yes," they admitted, "perhaps it would be more prudent, General, but we have been waiting three years already!"

In General De la Rey's Commando, which comprised burghers from eight large districts, it had been found necessary to appoint marriage officers, and quite a large number of marriages were contracted. I mention this to show how diversified are the duties of the Boer general in war-time, and what sort of strange offices he is sometimes called upon to perform.

It will be seen from what I have said that occasionally the dark horizon of our veldt life was lit up by the bright sunshine of the lighter elements of life. At most times our outlook was gloomy enough, and our hearts were heavily weighed down by cares. I often found my thoughts involuntarily turning to those who had so long and so faithfully stood shoulder to shoulder with me through all the vicissitudes of war, fighting for what we regarded as our holy right, to obtain which we were prepared to sacrifice our lives and our all. Unconsciously I recalled on this Christmas Day the words of General Joubert addressed to us outside Ladysmith in 1899: "Happy the Africander who shall not survive the termination of this War." Time

will show, if it has not already shown, the wisdom of General Joubert's words.

Just about this time rumours of various kinds were spread abroad. From several sources we heard daily that the War was about to end, that the English had evacuated the country because their funds were exhausted, that Russia and France had intervened, and that Lord Kitchener had been captured by De Wet and liberated on condition that he and his troops left South Africa immediately. It was even said that General Botha had received an invitation from the British Government to come and arrange a Peace on "independence" lines.

Nobody will doubt that we on the veldt were desperately anxious to hear the glad tidings of Peace. We were weary of the fierce struggle, and we impatiently awaited the time when the Commandant-General and the Government should order us to sheathe the sword.

But the night of the Old Year left us engaged in the fierce conflict of hostilities, and the dawn of the New Year found us still enveloped in the clouds of war—clouds whose blackness was relieved by no silver lining.

CHAPTER XLV.

MY LAST DAYS ON THE VELDT.

THE first month of 1902 found the storm of death and destruction still unabated, and the prospect appeared as dark as at the commencement of the previous year. Our hand, however, was on the plough, and there was no looking back. My instructions were, "Go forward and persevere".

To the south of Lydenburg, where a section of my commando under General Muller was operating, the enemy kept us very busy, for they had one or more columns engaged. We, to the north of Lydenburg, had a much calmer time of it than our brethren to the south of that place, for there the British were pursuing their policy of exhausting our people with unsparing hand. I attribute the fact that we in the north were left comparatively undisturbed to the mountainous nature of the country. It would have been impossible for the British to have captured us or to have invaded our mountain recesses successfully without a tremendous force, and, obviously, the British had no such force at their disposal. Probably also the British had some respect for the prowess of my commando. An English officer afterwards told me in all seriousness that the British Intelligence Department had information that I was prowling round to the north of Lydenburg with 4,000 men and two cannons, and that my men were so splendidly fortified that our position was unconquerable. Of course, it was not in my interest to enlighten him upon the point. I was a prisoner-of-war when this amusing

information was given me, and I simply answered: "Yes, your intelligence officers are very smart fellows." The officer then inquired, with an assumption of candour and innocence, whether it was really a fact that we had still cannon in the field. To this I retorted: "What would you think if I put a similar question to a British officer who had fallen into my hands?" At this he bit his thumb and stammered: "I beg your pardon; I did not mean to—er—insult you." He was quite a young chap this, a conceited puppy, affecting the "haw-haw," which seems to be epidemic in the British Army. His hair was parted down the centre, in the manner so popular among certain British officers, and this style of hair-dressing came to be described by the Boers as "middelpaadje" (middle-path). As a matter of fact, my men only numbered as many hundreds as the thousands attributed to me by the British. As for cannons, they simply existed in the imagination of the British Intelligence Department.

Affairs were daily growing more critical. Since the beginning of the year we had made several attempts at destroying the Delagoa Bay Railway, but the British had constructed so formidable a network of barbed wire, and their blockhouses were so close together and strongly garrisoned, that hitherto our attempts had been abortive. The line was also protected by a large number of armoured trains.

In consequence of our ill-success in this enterprise, we turned our attention to other directions. We reconnoitred the British garrisons in the Lydenburg district with the object of striking at their weakest point. A number of my officers and men proceeded under cover of darkness right through the British outposts, and gained the Lydenburg village by crawling on their hands and knees. On their return journey they were challenged and fired on several times, and managed only with difficulty to return to camp

unhurt. The object of the reconnaissance was, however, accomplished. They reported to me that the village was encompassed with barbed wire, and that a number of blockhouses had been built round it, and also that various large houses of the village had been barricaded and were strongly occupied. My two professional scouts, Jordaan and Mellema, had also reconnoitred the village from another direction, and had brought back confirmatory information and the news that Lydenburg was occupied by about 2,000 British soldiers, consisting of the Manchester Regiment and the First Royal Irish, together with a corps of "hands-uppers" under the notorious Harber. Three other Boer spies scouting about the forts on the Crocodile Heights also brought in discouraging reports.

At the Council of War which then took place, and over which I presided, these reports were discussed, and we agreed to attack the two blockhouses nearest the village, and there-after to storm the village itself. I should mention that it was necessary for us to capture the blockhouses before attempting to take the village itself, for had we left them intact we should have run the danger of having our retreat cut off.

The attack was to take place next night, and as we approached the British lines on horseback, between Spekboom River and Potloodspruit, we dismounted, and proceeded cautiously on foot. One of the objective blockhouses was on the waggon path to the north of the village, and the other was 1,000 yards to the east of Potloodspruit. Field-Cornet Young, accompanied by Jordaan and Mellema, crept up to within 10 feet of one of these blockhouses, and brought me a report that the barbed wire network which surrounded it rendered an assault an impossible task in the darkness. Separating my commando of 150 men into two bodies, I placed them on either side of the blockhouse, sending, in the meanwhile, four men to cut down the wire fences. These men had instructions to give

us a signal when they had achieved this object, so that we could then proceed to storm the fort. It would have been sacrificing many in vain to have attempted to proceed without effecting the preliminary operation of fence cutting, since, if we had stormed a blockhouse without first removing the wire, we should have become entangled in the fences and have offered splendid targets to the enemy at a very short range, and our losses would, without doubt, have been considerable.

My fence-cutters stuck doggedly to their task despite the fact that they were being fired upon by the sentries on guard. It was a long and weary business, but we patiently waited, lying on the ground. Towards 2 o'clock in the morning the officer in command of the wire-cutters returned to us, stating that they had accomplished their object in cutting the first wire barrier, but had come across another which it would require several hours to cut through. The sentries had, in the meantime, grown unpleasantly vigilant, and were now frequently firing on our men. They were often so close that at one time, in the darkness, they might have knocked up against the Boers who were cutting their fences.

It being very nearly 3 o'clock, it appeared to me that the attempt would be ineffectual owing to the approach of daylight, and we were forced to retire before the rays of the rising sun lit the heavens and exposed us to the well-aimed fire of the British. I therefore resolved, after consulting my officers, to retire quietly, and to renew my attempt a week later at another point. We returned to camp much disappointed, but consoled ourselves with the hope that success would attend our next efforts.

CHAPTER XLVI.

I AM AMBUSHED AND CAPTURED.

I MAY say that the barbed wire fences by which the blockhouses were encompassed, constituted very formidable obstacles to our attacks. Our men were comparatively few, and we could not afford to lose any of them in futile attempts to capture strongly garrisoned British forts. Moreover, there were many other ways of inflicting damage on the enemy that did not lay us open to so much danger.

Heavy and continuous rains had been experienced for some time, and the rivers and spruits were greatly swollen. The whole of the Lydenburg district, in which we were operating, was besides enveloped in a thick mist, and both these causes rendered reconnoitring very difficult and perilous, as we never knew how near the enemy's patrols might be.

About the 15th of January, 1902, I obtained information that our Government were being chased all over the country, and had now encamped at Windhoek near Dullstroom, to the south of Lydenburg. At the same time I received an order from Acting-President Schalk Burger, stating that he wished to see me. This latter intelligence was very acceptable, for I was anxious to renew acquaintance with the President, and with a personal friend of mine, Mr. J. C. Krojk, who was attached to the Field Government. Therefore, on receiving this instruction, I set out from Pilgrim's Rest accompanied by Adjutants Nel, Coetzee, Bester, and Potgieter, for the place where the Government were encam-

ped. I little expected as I rode along that this would be my last and most fateful expedition.

I calculated that I should be away eight days, and, wishing to be present at any active operations that might be conducted, I instructed my brother, whom I left in charge of my forces, to make no attack during my absence. After leaving Pilgrim's Rest, I and my companions rode briskly forth along the path past Dornbock, Roodekrans and Kruger's Post. We encamped at the latter place at night-fall. Next day we again set out, and having succeeded in passing the British forts and blockhouses to the north of Lydenburg, we came upon the Spekboom River. This river was so swollen by the recent rains that no fording was possible, and we were only able to cross by making our horses swim. At one o'clock we reached Koodekraus, and off-saddled there. This place is about 15 miles to the west of Lydenburg. At dawn the next day, after having reconnoitred the country in the neighbourhood, we proceeded cautiously in the direction of Steenkampsberg until we were met by messengers, who told us precisely where our Government was to be found. That evening we found our locomotive Administration encamped at Mopochsburgen, to which place they had retreated before a hostile column, which was operating from Belfast.

The greetings that were exchangd were of the heartiest character, and we sat chatting round the camp fires far into the night. That we had much to talk about and many stories to relate of the vicissitudes of war needs no saying. I personally received the very lamentable tidings that my sister, her husband, and three of their children had died in the Concentration Camp at Pietersburg.

Two days after we arrived, the Government received a report from General Muller stating that two hostile columns were approaching. We had not long to wait. The enemy attacked us in the afternoon, but did not succeed in driving

us from our position. We were not, however, in a position to sustain a long battle, owing to scarcity of ammunition. Many of our burghers had only five cartridges left and some had not even one. Therefore, that same night—I think it was the 21st of January although I had lost count of dates—the Government, whom I accompanied, departed and proceeded to the Kloof Oshoek, between Dullstroom and Lydenburg. The weather was very unpropitious, rain falling in torrents, and as may be understood, we were in a sad plight. We were protected by nothing except our mackintoshes, and greatly envied a member of the party who was the proud possessor of a small piece of canvas.

It had been decided that the Government should proceed on the 25th of January from Oshoek to Pilgrim's Rest, but the information that the British were not pressing their pursuit, caused them to give up this project, for it was thought advisable to await the enemy's next move. I should here mention that the further the Government were chased, the more difficult they found it to keep up communications with the Commandant-General and the Orange Free State Government. With the latter, however, despatches were being exchanged concerning very important matters which I consider it as still improper to disclose. The Government having determined not to proceed, I decided to bid farewell, and to proceed with my attendants on the way to Pilgrim's Rest.

Accordingly, on the 25th of January, we left the Government at Oshoek and rode along to Zwagerhoek, where we remained till sundown. We were now nearing the enemy's country, and so, having carefully reconnoitred the ground, we set forth cautiously at dusk. Two young Boers, who were also on the road to Pilgrim's Rest, had meanwhile joined us, and, including my kaffir servant, our party comprised eight persons. We soon passed the fateful spot where Commandant Schoenman had been

captured in the early part of the War, and forded the Spekboom River.

I am not surperstitious, but I must confess that somehow or other I experienced considerable disquietude about this time, and felt cold shivers running down my back. We were just approaching Bloomplaats, which is about two and half miles to the west of Lydenburg, when we observed something moving. A deadly silence enveloped the country, and the brightly shining moon gave a weird appearance to the moving objects in the distance which had attracted our attention. Our suspicions were aroused and we went in pursuit, but soon lost sight of the object of our quest. We discovered afterwards that our suspicions were well-founded, and that the moving objects were kaffir spies, who returned to the British lines and reported our approach. Having failed in this enterprise we returned to the road, I riding in advance with Adjutant Bester, the others following. Presently we approached a deep spruit, and having dismounted, we were cautiously leading our horses down the steep bank, when suddenly we found ourselves the centre of a perfect storm of bullets. We were completely taken by surprise, and almost before we realised what had happened, we found ourselves confronted by two rows of British soldiery, who shouted "Hands up," and fired simultaneously. Bullets whistled in every direction. The first volley laid my horse low, and I found myself on the ground half stunned. When I recovered somewhat and lifted my head, I discovered myself surrounded, but the dust and the flash of firing prevented me from seeing much of what occurred. It seemed hopeless to attempt escape, and I cried excitedly that I was ready to surrender. So loud, however, was the noise of shouting that my cries were drowned. One soldier viciously pressed his gun against my breast as if about to shoot me, but thrusting the barrel away, I said in English that I saw

no chance of escape, that I did not defend myself, and there was no reason therefore why he should kill me. While I was talking he again drove his rifle against me, and I, having grasped it firmly, a very animated argument took place, for he strongly resented my grasping his gun. Outstretching my hand I asked "Tommy" to help me up, and this he did. I afterwards learned that the name of my assailant was Patrick, and that he belonged to the Irish Rifles.

Four or five soldiers now took charge of me, and at my request consented to conduct me to an officer. Just as they were about to lead me away, however, they all fell flat upon their chests, and directed, their fire at an object, which turned out later to be a bush. I very soon discovered that the "Tommies" were not very circumspect in their fire, and I sought safety by lying on the ground. Having discovered the innocent nature of their target, my guards conducted me before one of their officers, a young man named Walsh, who seemed to belong to the British Intelligence Department. This officer enquired, "Well, what is it?" I answered him in his own language, "My name is Viljoen, and not wishing to be plundered by your soldiers, I desire to place myself under the protection of an officer." He was quite a minor officer this Mr. Walsh, but he said kindly, "All right, it is rather a lucky haul, sir; you look quite cool, are you hurt?" I replied that I was not hurt, though it was a miracle that I was still alive, for a bullet had struck my chest, and would have penetrated had my pocket-book not stopped it. The fact was, that my pocket-book had served the providential service of the proverbial bible or pack of cards. Bester was with me, and not seeing my other adjutants, I enquired what had become of them. Walsh did not reply at once, and one of the "Tommies" standing close by said, "Both killed, sor." This information was a terrible blow to me.

Major Orr, of the Royal Irish Regiment, was in charge of the force that had captured me, and presently I was taken before him. He greeted me most courteously and said, "I believe we are old friends, General Viljoen; at least you captured some of my comrades in that regrettable affair at Belfast." I was greatly touched by Major Orr's kindness, and asked that I might see those of my men who had been killed. He immediately consented, and led me a few paces aside. My gaze was soon arrested by a heartrending spectacle. There on the ground lay the two lifeless forms of my brave and faithful adjutants, Jacobus Nel and L. Jordaan. As I bent over their prostrate bodies my eyes grew dim with the sad tears of my great bereavement. Major Orr stood uncovered by my side, touched by my deep emotion and paying homage to the brave dead. "These men were heroes," I said to him with broken voice. "They followed me because they loved me, and they fearlessly risked their lives for me several times." The good Major was full of sympathy, and made provision for the decent burial of my poor comrades at Lydenburg.

Bester and I were now conducted under an escort of 150 soldiers with fixed bayonets to the village, which was two and a half miles off. We reached Lydenburg very wet and gloomy, after having waded through a drift whose waters reached up to our armpits. Major Orr did his best to console us both with refreshment and kind words.

Our procession was presently joined by an officer of the British Intelligence Department, and this gentleman told me that he knew of the approach of my party, and that the chief object of the British in attacking us was to capture our itinerant Government, who they learned were to accompany us. He was very anxious to know where the Government was, and whether it was intended that they should pass that way. But I answered his queries by telling him that it was quite unworthy of a gentleman

to put such questions to me, and to attempt to exploit my most unfortunate position.

Arriving at the village, I was treated with great courtesy, and was introduced by Major Orr to Colonel Guinness, the commanding officer. Colonel Guinness declared that he regarded it as an honour to have a man of my rank as a prisoner-of-war, and that we had fought so frequently that we were quite old friends. I thanked him for his compliment, expressing, however, my regret that we had renewed aquaintance under such unfortunate circumstances.

"That is the fortune of war," said the Colonel. "You have nothing to be ashamed of, General." We were treated very well by our captors, and were given accommodation in the apartments of my old friend Captain Milner, who now filled the office of Provost-Marshal. My meeting with this gentleman was very cordial, and we sat up till nearly daybreak relating our different adventures since we had last met at Roos Senekal, where the worthy Captain was made prisoner by me. He assured me that his regiment entertained the highest respect for me and my burghers, and that they appreciated the fact that we had fought fairly and gallantly and had well-treated our prisoners-of-war, Bester and I remained under Milner's care throughout our stay at Lydenburg, and I shall always remember with gratitude the kindness extended me by the officers of the Royal Irish Regiment.

CHAPTER XLVII.

SHIPPED TO ST. HELENA.

WE were kept at Lydenburg until about the 30th of January, 1902, and during our stay there I obtained leave to write a letter to my burghers. In this I acquainted them and my brother with what had occurred, and exhorted them to keep up their hearts and persevere. Although kindly treated at Lydenberg, I cannot adequately describe the feeling of disappointment and sorrow which my enforced inaction caused me. I would have given anything to have been able to return to my commando, and felt that I would rather have been killed than have fallen into the enemy's hands. Being thus rendered impotent I could but curse my fate.

Friendships which are formed on the veldt are strong indeed, and the men who have lived together through all the vicissitudes of war for twenty-eight months—through sunshine and rain, happiness and sorrow, prosperity and adversity—become attached one to another with lasting affections. My sufferings hit me very keenly. Besides the sadness which separation from my companions caused me, I acutely felt my position as, having been before in the habit of commanding and of being obeyed by others, I was now subject to the humiliation of having to obey the orders of British privates.

We prisoners were conveyed from Lydenburg to Machadodorp under the charge of Colonel Urenston, of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, with an escort of 2,000 men. I was at a loss to know why so large a force

should have been sent to guard me, but this seemingly exaggerated precaution was soon explained when I was told that Lord Kitchener had given special orders that great care was to be taken to prevent my commando from rescuing me. I must say that there was not much chance of that occurring. Colonel Urenston was a very courteous soldier, and treated me as well as could be expected.

Reaching Machadodorp four days later, I was handed over at Dalmanutha Station to Captain Pearson, a staff officer, who subsequently conducted me and my fellow prisoners to Pretoria. Some days after my arrival there I was taken before Lord Kitchener, and was received very courteously by him at his office. My interview with this great General lasted about half an hour. The Commander-in-Chief of the British Army in South Africa impressed me as being a real soldier, a man possessed of a strong will not marred by arrogance.

I did not know what the British military authorities proposed to do with me, and felt quite indifferent as to the matter. At dawn on the third day after my arrival I was awakened by a soldier and informed that I was to be taken to the station. The train was in readiness when I arrived, and the officer in charge invited me to take a seat in his compartment. I was then told that we were to proceed to Durban, but no information was given me as to my ultimate destination.

On the train we prisoners were treated with great courtesy, but on reaching Durban a different experience awaited us. Here I was placed under the charge of Colonel Ellet, a very irascible person. This Colonel greeted me with the information that he was quite delighted that I had been captured. He repeated this gratuitous insult three times, and, my patience being exhausted, I asked him to be kind enough to tell me where he was instructed to convey me, and not to cause me unnecessary pain by

his taunts. He apologised lamely and told me that I was to proceed on board ship. This very much surprised me, and I remarked that I had already been taken from home and hearth 500 miles. This ill-tempered creature then leaned back arrogantly in his armchair, puffing at his cigar, and said: "Well, ah, you are banished, don't you know. You are to be sent to St. Helena, or as we call it, 'The Rock.' You will shortly embark. It is a large ship you are going in; it is called—ah, let me see, oh, yes, the *Britannica*. I will proceed to the station and order your kit, and in the meantime you must sign this parole and report yourself forthwith at the docks." I said in Dutch, which the Colonel did not understand, "Lord deliver me from this evil person."

On arriving on board ship I found several other Boer prisoners-of-war, amongst them my old friend Erasmus, who masqueraded as a general in the early stages of the War. Never having been before upon the sea I was soon in the throes of *mal de mer*, and the prospect was certainly not encouraging. There was no help for it, however. Colonel Curtis, of the Royal Artillery, who was in charge of the troops on board, was a very polite and pleasant person, and very welcome after that extraordinary creature, Ellet. We were provided with good cabins and the food was excellent. Before leaving the Bay General Lyttelton visited me and showed himself very friendly. I soon found out that Mrs. Lyttelton was proceeding on the same boat to England. My company must have been rather unattractive, seeing that I was only well for one day during the whole voyage.

The steamer was ordered to call at Cape Town, and when we neared this port the guard kept over us was strengthened. An officer remained with us continually and counted us every two hours to make sure that none of us had escaped. One day two young Boers conspired

to make a fool of the officer, and concealed themselves in the lavatory. Their absence was discovered the next time we were counted, and the officer in charge, in a great state of perturbation, demanded of us what had become of them. We took up the joke at once, and replied that they had gone on shore to be shaved and would return at 7 o'clock. This entirely took his breath away. But the absurdity of the situation so got the better of us that we burst out into ironical laughter, and finally set our custodian at ease by producing the two fugitives. We were punished for our little joke, however, by having our paroles withdrawn.

On the 19th of February the ship, with its sorrowful freight, steamed away from Cape Town. We prisoners, assembled on the upper deck, bade a very sorrowful farewell to the shores of our dear Fatherland. Long and sadly did we gaze upon the fast receding land from which we expected to be alienated for ever. Notwithstanding our depressing circumstances, however, we attempted pluckily to keep up our spirits, and with laughter and frivolity to cheer each other. Most of us had never been on a ship before, and only one of our number had ever voyaged away from South Africa. Ours was a very cheerless prospect, for, although we did not know our exact fate, banishment for life loomed over us. The ship's officers were urbanity itself, and did everything in their power for our comfort. I shall always remember their kindness, but it would have required much more than human effort to have made our voyage enjoyable owing to the fact that we suffered so intensely from sea-sickness.

After a very cheerless and discomforting voyage, we dropped anchor on the 24th of February in St. Helena Harbour. "The Rock" rose out of the ocean, bare and rugged, and imprisonment upon it offered a gloomy prospect. No animal was visible, and foliage was wanting,

I never saw a less attractive place than Jamestown, the port at which we landed. The houses seemed to be tumbling over one another in a "kloof." We were all gloomily impressed, and somebody near me said, "This will be our living graves." I answered, "No wonder that Napoleon broke his heart upon this God-forsaken rock." I must confess that the feeling grew upon us that we were to be treated as ordinary criminals, since only murderers and dangerous people are banished to such places to be forgotten by mankind.

An English officer came to me and asked what I thought of the Island. My feelings got the better of me, and I replied—"It seems a suitable place for England's felons, but it is very spiteful of England to deport here men whose only crime has been to fight for their country. It would have been much more merciful to have killed us at once than to make us drag out an existence in a manner so dreary."

We were soon taken ashore by boats to Jamestown, and there learned to our great disgust that we were all to be put in quarantine for bubonic plague, and to be isolated at Lemon Valley, a valley in which I afterwards found that lemons were conspicuous by their absence. No greenery was to be seen in this desolate place. While our debarkation was proceeding one of the boats capsized, but, happily, everybody escaped with nothing worse than a ducking.

Quarantine regulations were enforced for six days at Lemon Valley. The accommodation was very inadequate, and our culinary utensils, though not primitive, were very bad, the food being such as might have been the portion of criminals.

Luckily for us a British Censor named Baron von Ahlenfeldt, and a doctor named Casey had accompanied us, and owing to their instrumentality we were allowed

better food and treatment. At the end of our detention in the quarantine camp some of our number were removed to Broadbottom Camp, while the others were quartered at Deadwood Camp. Lieutenant Bathurst, who now assumed the position of our custodian, was a good prototype of friend Ellet at Durban, and he was at pains to treat us as felons rather than as prisoners-of-war.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

LIFE IN BONAPARTE'S PRISON.

IN order to reach Broadbottom Camp we had to ascend a remarkably rocky cliff named "Jacob's Ladder," the face of which was cut into a multitudinous series of steps. Having reached the summit we found a pleasing view of the Island opened before us. We now discovered that St. Helena was not the totally-barren rock we had at first been led to suppose. Patches of trees and greenery met our gaze, and in the midst of a carefully-cultivated plantation we espied a beautiful house, the habitation of the Governor of the Island. On our way we encountered a party of our fellow-prisoners, who, having been guilty of insubordination, were being taken to the dreary fort at High Knoll for punishment. Amongst these unfortunates we recognised several friends, but were not permitted to talk to them.

At sundown our destination was reached at Broadbottom Camp, which is situated under High Peak. Before us stretched a large space enclosed by four encirclements of barbed wire containing the tents and houses which formed the temporary homes of the prisoners-of-war. Sentries were posted at every hundred paces. There were 2,000 prisoners stationed here, and as they wandered aimlessly round they forcibly reminded me of the Israelites in exile.

On entering the camp I was received by the commandant, Colonel Wright, a typical Briton, who made no pleasant impression upon me. I shall not be querulous,

although the Colonel very bluntly notified to me that he had no instructions but to treat me in the same manner as the ordinary prisoners, and added that as my name had appeared in the list of Boer officers who were sentenced to banishment, he doubted whether I was entitled even to the treatment accorded to the ordinary prisoners-of-war. However, a tent was erected for me, and I and my companions in adversity were given beds and culinary utensils. My bed consisted of two khaki blankets and a waterproof sheet, and my kitchen utensils comprised a pot, a washing basin, a pail, two enamelled plates, two large mugs, and a spoon. This is a complete inventory of the articles with which I was provided. I and the prisoners who had accompanied me had not tasted food throughout the whole day, and we would have gone supperless to bed had it not been that some compassionate brother prisoners ministered to our inner needs by providing us with some bully beef and bread, which, though but a frugal meal, was very welcome to us.

Camp life of the kind I now experienced was wearisome indeed. There was nothing to do, and we tried to while away the time by singing psalms and songs. At night the camp and its environments were rendered almost as bright as day by the glaring light of huge naptha flares and by large searchlights which played round, making attempts at escape hopeless. It appeared to me that the searchlights were continually being turned in my direction, and I can assure you that I wished these glaring abominations at Hades. The buzzing and roaring noise given forth by the naptha lamps, the monotonous chanting of the prisoners, the perpetual "All's well" of the sentries, and the intermingling notes of the bugle calls suffused the air with their distracting sounds and made me feel as if my head were in a maëlstrom. The bugler was so amiable a person that he always made it a point of standing close

to my tent when launching forth to the world his shrieking calls. Happily I became acclimatised to my distasteful surroundings, or I fear I should have soon graduated as a patient for a lunatic asylum.

I unhappily became at an early date acquainted with Colonel Price, commanding the troops on the Island. I shall never forget his demeanour towards me, for from the first his attitude was arrogant, cruel, and generally unbearable. He refused me parole, and declined to give me a pass beyond the confines of the camp. The unreasonableness of this hard treatment will be seen when it is remembered that not the slightest possibility of escape from the Island existed. The close confinement began to play havoc with my health, and I was in the fair way to the hospital, when a friendly docter intervened and restored me to health once more. The rigid discipline and the stern regulations that were enforced can only be likened to what is experienced in monastic life. The "red-tape" curse prevailed everywhere.

Subsequently Colonel Price modified his tone towards me and allowed me parole. He was also gracious enough to permit me and some companions to occupy a little house 400 paces from the camp. This was a very agreeable change, for now we were no longer subjected to the harsh treatment of the "Tommies." Our little residence rejoiced in the pleasantly-floral name of the "Myrtle Grove," and was rented by us from an old coloured lady who vigorously insisted upon the punctual payment of the rent, and drew our special attention to the fact that plucking pears in the garden was strictly prohibited.

We had been told that the "Myrtle Grove" was haunted by ghosts, but the ghosts, if any there were, must have been pro-Boers, since they never disturbed us. But though we had no ghostly visitors we certainly had some of another kind. The house was perfectly infested by par-

ticularly large and bold rats. These thieving rodents, not satisfied with robbing our larder, had the audacity to sup off our fingers and ears while we were asleep. We waged vigorous war against the vermin, and after condiserable difficulty managed to get the residence exclusively to ourselves. With the addition of some furniture, with which Colonel Wright was good enough to provide us, we made our house so comfortable that we felt ourselves almost in a position to invite the Governor to dinner.

Our landlady, Mrs. Joshua, was the proud possessor of several donkeys, which were turned loose in our garden, and a large number of fowls. I may say that Mrs. Joshua was very ill-advised in keeping her fowls so near our house, for our cook, who had been trained in commando, was unable to resist the temptation of appropriating eggs. It did not, however, take our landlady long to find out what happening, and we were informed that it was very much more Christianlike to purchase eggs. We took the hint, and adopted as far as we could Christianlike methods, though we found it extremely difficult to subscribe to all the principles of Christianity practised by the Islanders.

We whiled away the time by taking daily walks, and, by making excursions to the house at Longwood tenanted by Napoleon Bonaparte for six and a half years, and to the grave where his remains were interred for 19 years. I noticed that both places were being preserved and kept in order by the French Government. We used to sit by the little fountain, where the great French warrior so frequently sat, and read. We were permitted to drink a glass of water from this historical spring.

At Deadwood Camp 4,000 of my compatriots were confined. Some had been there for over two years, and I could not help admiring their discipline. It is not for me to criticise the entirely unnecessary restrictions to wich these unfortunate prisoners were subjected, but I will point

out that the severity practised towards helpless prisoners by armed soldiers created feelings of great bitterness. It was a stupid policy to pursue and perhaps fateful.

The military authorities were entirely unacquainted with the character and mannerisms of the Boers, and were advised in this connection by so-called "Cape" or "English" Afrikanders, who bear an ineradicable hatred to the Boers, and who always did their utmost to cause the prisoners to be treated with humiliation and contempt. Happily a number of English officers whom I met on the Island saw that we were not so black as we had been painted. Most of the officers who acted as our custodians here had come direct from England and knew nothing of South Africa. One of these gentlemen confessed to me that when he left London for St. Helena he had a sort of idea that he was to be placed in charge of a troop of wild barbarians, and that he had been quite agreeably disappointed. He declared, indeed, that he had found that the Afrikander in some respects was superior to men of his own nation.

It was undoubtedly a sad error for England to send officers to look after us, who, not having had any experience of South African warfare, were entirely ignorant of our idiosyncrasies and manners. The result of placing these inexperienced men as our guards was that one misunderstanding followed upon another, and that unnecessarily rigorous regulations were promulgated to preserve discipline and order. This treatment had the effect of nourishing within our bosoms hatred and bitterness.

Not being desirous of having to undergo incarceration with my insubordinate fellow-prisoners at High Knoll Fort, I carefully refrained from being unruly, and practised an orderly and amiable demeanour.

On one occasion I ventured to approach Colonel Price with a view to obtaining some amelioration in our treatment, and some remission of the rigorous regulations

meted out to us. After keeping me waiting half an hour he came out of his office to meet me, but instead of extending a greeting he stared at me with ill-concealed amazement, probably expecting that I should jump up and salute him. I, however, merely rose and nodded, and enquired if I had the honour of addressing Colonel Price. He answered stiffly. "Yes, what do you want?" It was greatly disconcerting to be thus unceremoniously and discourteously greeted, and having explained my mission, I withdrew and took care to fight shy of this arrogant soldier in future.

I may say that our little party at "Myrtle Grove" was a few weeks later augmented by the arrival of Vaal Piet Uys and Landdrost T. Kelly.

We had in the meantime improved our acquaintance with Colonel Wright, who always treated us with cordiality and kindness, and allowed us frequently the privilege of spending pleasant afternoons at his house. Mrs. Wright was a charming hostess, and did everything in her power to lessen the feeling of humiliation with which we regarded our sad plight.

I should perhaps mention that St. Helena boasts of some elegant society. A few years before our confinement the Zulu chief, Dinizulu, was banished within the rocky bounds of this island prison. This son of Cain had during his detention here been invited to all the fashionable parties and dances, and had been honoured with an invitation to the Governor's house. He was fêted at dinners and public festivities—but of course it must be remembered that Dinizulu was a kaffir and we were only Boers. Fancy, my Afrikander brothers, a self-respecting English young lady consenting to dance with this uncivilised kaffir! Imagine, they allowed him to dine at the same table, and to drive in the same carriage, with them! I do not know how this information strikes my readers, but I must say

that when the Governor of the Island, an elderly gentleman named Sterndale, with 35 years of the Indian Civil Service behind him, informed me that such had been the case, I was rendered speechless.

I would not have it supposed, however, that we prisoners had any special ambition to attend balls and dinners, for we were not in the mood for festivities, and even had we desired we could hardly with propriety have appeared at these elegant boards and gatherings dressed in our shabby apparel.

A number of the prisoners received permission from the authorities to pursue the various crafts and employments with which they were conversant, at the small daily wage of between sixpence and a shilling. This pay was a ridiculously small remuneration for the large amount of work which the men executed. A number of trades were represented by us prisoners. One was a mason, another a farmer, a third an apothecary, while a fourth was a goldsmith, and so far did we go that one man was appointed caterer for the St. Helena Club.

Months had now passed since I had been first brought a captive to this island prison, and it approached the middle of May. Persistent though rather vague reports about Peace continually reached us, but owing to the strictness of the censors, who had an exaggerated idea of their duties, any news from outside came to our anxious ears in very small pieces, and gave us a very meagre idea of what was happening in South Africa and other places outside. That we were all praying earnestly for Peace needs no telling, especially if I may mention that some of my comrades had been incarcerated on the island for two years and eight months. I cannot adequately tell how wearisome their long exile was to them.

Just before I was liberated from confinement, our old antagonists, the 3rd Battalion of "Buffs," under Colonel

Brinckman, were detailed to the Island. This regiment had seen two years of active service in South Africa, and they were, therefore, soldiers who did not hold their enemies in contempt.

I do not feel at this time, in view of the present tension of affairs, able to pursue my account further; but if encouraged by a sympathetic public to supplement this effort by a more detailed description of my imprisonment at St. Helena, I may in the near future again seek their indulgence.

Meanwhile, I take what I hope will prove but a temporary leave of my readers, with the following explanatory details and critical comments on the general characteristics of the War.

CHAPTER XLIX.

HOW WE BLEW UP AND CAPTURED TRAINS.

LOOKING at the matter superficially it seems a very barbarous thing to derail and destroy trains with dynamite, but this was the only course left open to us, since large military stores were being continually brought in by the British from the coast. We honestly regretted that, owing to the derailment and destruction of trains, drivers, stokers, and often innocent passengers were launched into eternity. War is at best a cruel and illogical way of settling disputes, and the measures which the belligerent parties are sometimes compelled to take are of such a character that sentimentality does not enter into any of the calculations of the contending parties.

It should not be necessary to assure my readers that we acted entirely within our rights in derailing and destroying trains. This was the only means we had of breaking the British lines of communication and of interrupting the conveyance of British troops and food.

Moreover, we were more than justified in any act of train-derailment that we committed, by the instructions of Lord Wolseley as expressed in his handbook. In that well-known publication this distinguished soldier actually prescribes the use of dynamite, and even suggests the manner in which it may be employed to the best advantage. But although this train-wrecking was in every degree justifiable, I can assure the reader that we regarded it as a very unpalatable duty. I remember that when Lord Kitchener

complained to me about the destruction of a certain train, I sent him a reply to the following effect:—

"That the blowing up and destroying of trains was as distasteful to me as I hoped the burning of our houses was to his Excellency; and that when we derailed trains we entered upon the task with hearts quite as heavy as those which I presumed weighed down his troops when they deported our women and children from their homes to the Concentration Camps."

I shall now describe how we went to work in the matter of capturing trains. That this is not so easy a task as appears to be supposed I shall endeavour to show. Perhaps the best way to exemplify our method of procedure would be to describe a particular instance which occurred in March, 1901, between Beltast and Wonderfontein on the Delagoa Bay Railway. The two stations are approximately 12 miles apart. At either station a garrison had been established, and these were provided with two or three cannons and two armoured trains, which latter were held in readiness to proceed to any place within their immediate sphere of action when anything irregular occurred on the line. They were used besides to carry reinforcements and stores when needed. The armoured train was indeed a very important factor in the British military tactics, and one we had to take fully into account. The railway between these two stations was also guarded by block-houses. Every morning the British soldiers carefully inspected their particular section of the railway before trains were despatched in any direction. The peril of running trains at night was speedily recognised, and of those that attempted the journey very few indeed escaped capture. On the particular occasion when the incident I am about to relate took place, we were encamped at Steenkampsbergen, enjoying a little remission from the arduous work in which we had been engaged. But we were not idle, and a field-cornetcy of approximately a hundred men was detailed to attempt the capture of a

train. I personally reconnoitred the line, and sent a field-cornet with instructions to lay a mine at the most favourable spot for the distasteful operation we were about to perform.

Our *modus operandi* was to take a Martini-Henri rifle and saw off four inches before and behind the magazine, and then to so file the trigger guard that the trigger was left exposed. Two of the most intelligent burghers were despatched over night with this mutilated rifle and a packet of dynamite to the spot chosen for the mine, while two other burghers kept guard.

Special precautions were taken to prevent footmarks being traced by the British patrols, the burghers walking for a considerable distance on the rails. The mine was prepared by carefully removing the stones from underneath the rails and as cautiously replacing them to again fill up the hole after the instruments of destruction had been adjusted. The trigger was placed in contact with the dynamite, and just enough above ground to be affected by the weight of the locomotive, but so little exposed as to be passed unnoticed. All surplus stones were carried off in a bag and great care was taken to conceal all traces of the mine. Gingerly and cautiously and without leaving any trace of their visit, the burghers now returned to their field-cornet and reported that all was in order. The field-cornetcy took up its position behind a small hill about a mile from the railway, and the men concealed themselves and their horses so ingeniously that their presence was not even suspected by the occupants of the blockhouse close by. According to our information the first train that was to pass next morning was the mail train carrying the European mails, and the prospect of capturing some newspapers and thus obtaining news of the outside world, from which we had been insolated for several months, filled us with pleasant expectation. I especially instructed the field-cornet to obtain newspapers, and to capture as much food

and clothing as possible. It being the custom of the British garrisons to send scouts along the railway each day to examine the line, the next morning the track was as usual microscopically inspected, but the scouts failed to discover the trap which we had laid.

Two outpost burghers lay at the top of the hill in the grass, and from their coign of vantage they had a clear view of the railway line.

Ten o'clock in the morning arriving without a train appearing, my men began to grumble. In the excitement of this adventure they had omitted to prepare any food, and they were not now allowed to make fires, because the smoke evolved in culinary operations would have been immediately noticed by the enemy's outpost. We had therefore to remain hungry, or our well-laid plans would have been frustrated. Time passed on, and at 2 o'clock in the afternoon there were still no traces of the expected train. Our horses were saddled up and had been without food since the previous afternoon, and the poor animals also began to show their displeasure by whinnying and stamping their hoofs on the ground. The enemy's scouts had already inspected the line three or four times either by going over it on foot or by using a trolley.

The afternoon was well advanced, and fears were growing in our minds that the mine had been discovered. I should say that it was Sunday afternoon, and that the mine had been laid on Saturday night. This train-wrecking scheme of ours was contrary to the practices of our nation, who regard all such acts on Sunday as a desecration of the Sabbath, but here I will again apply an English precept, "The better the day the better the deed."

About four o'clock my outposts notified to me the approach of smoke, and shortly afterwards we beheld a train coming along. Every man of us mounted his horse, and we sat calmly in the saddle to observe the execution

of our plan. We held our breaths. Perhaps the British had detected the mine and removed it, with the result that all our travail would be in vain; or they might possibly have sent a large force of soldiers with cannon on the train to give us a "good hiding" to boot. We watched breathlessly the progress of the train as it rapidly approached the fatal spot, and our hearts thumped wildly as we waited to see the success or failure of our enterprise. We had not long to wait, for with a tremendous shock the mine exploded, overturning the engine, and bringing the train to a standstill.

We now proceeded to storm the train, but I saw the danger of advancing in a mass and shouted to my men to go carefully and spread out. When we were about 500 feet from the train the British fired a volley at us, but in so doing they merely displayed by their firing that there were not many riflemen on the train, and that those that there were, shot badly and at random. Thus shown the weakness of the enemy, we stormed with renewed vigour, and on arriving at about a hundred yards distance we dismounted. The defenders did not face our fire long before displaying the white flag. I stopped fire at once and the train was ours.

It was Lieutenant Crossby, of the Remount Department, who waved the white flag, and he now surrendered with about 20 "Tommies."

Among the occupants of the train was an old major, and on his saying that he was very sick, and was on his way to the hospital, we immediately apologised for having disturbed him and for the delay which our little operation had caused him. There were eight sacks of European mail in the train and these we seized. We liberated the "Tommies" after disarming them. The Lieutenant in charge was the sole person detained as a prisoner-of-war, and he was added to six other British officers who were

vegetating under our charge. Only a part of the train could be destroyed by us, as one section was occupied by women and children who were being transported to the Concentration Camps.

On the following morning the field-cornet brought me the papers and said with a smile, "You see I have brought you what you required, General." I was overjoyed to obtain tidings from the outside world. The letters were distributed about the laager, and there was abundance of reading matter. I felt rather sorry for the "Tommies" who were being thus mercilessly robbed of their letters, but I consoled myself with the thought that our plight was quite as bad as theirs, for we Boers had had no communication from any members of our families for twelve months, and we felt justified in making the "Tommies" share our misfortune. The Boers did not, however, get much satisfaction out of other men's epistles, and even those who could read English gave up the operation after having perused one or two, and threw away the sackfuls of letters with disappointed faces.

The capture of this train was our second success. Shortly before we had seized a train near Pan Station and had obtained a splendid haul. This particular train was carrying Christmas presents for the British soldiers, and we found a miscellaneous assortment of cakes, puddings and other delicacies. It was very amusing that we should be celebrating Christmas with cakes and puddings which had been intended for our opponents.

A few weeks after we had captured the train carrying the European mails we made another attempt at train wrecking, this time at Wonderfontein Station. All, too, went well on this occasion until we charged, and the British opened fire upon us with cannon. We were not favoured this time by any sort of cover, but had to attack over open ground, exposing ourselves to the heavy fire of

the guns and the fusilade of a hundred British riflemen. We had chanced this time upon an armoured train, and the trucks which bore the cannon had remained uninjured. The nut was rather too hard for us to crack, and failing to take the train by storm, we were compelled to retire, after having sustained the loss of three men, of whom one was my brave adjutant, Vivian Cogell. From what I have said I think my readers will agree that the capturing of a train is not always a "cake and ale" operation.

CHAPTER L.

HOW WE FED AND CLOTHED COMMANDOS.

AS early as March, 1901, we experienced the difficulty of adequately providing our commandos with the necessities of life. So far back as September, 1900, we had said good-bye at Hector's Spruit to our commissariat, and thence, no organized supplies existing, it may very well be imagined that the task of feeding the Boers was one of the most serious, and I may say disquieting, questions with which we had to deal. We were cut off from the world, and there was no means of importing stores. Of course the men who had been previously engaged on commissariat duty were enlisted in the fighting ranks so soon as they became available. From this date we had to feed ourselves on quite a different system. Each commandant looked after his own men and appointed two or three Boers whose special duty it was to ride round for provisions. It must not be supposed that we commandeered stores without signing receipts, and the storekeeper who supplied us was provided with an acknowledgment, countersigned by field-cornet, commandant, and general. On producing this document to our Government the holder received probably one-third of the amount in cash and the balance in Government notes, better known as "blue-backs." By this time a large portion of the Republic had been occupied by the British, all food-stuffs had been removed or destroyed, and most of the cattle had been captured. In consequence, everything in the shape of food became very scarce. Flour, coffee, sugar &c., were now

regarded as delicacies remembered from the far-away past. The salt supplies were especially low, and we feared that without salt we would not be able to live, or if we did manage to exist, that we might bring upon ourselves an epidemic of disease. Our fears in this respect were increased by the opinions expressed by our doctors, and we viewed our situation with considerable disquietude. Happily, as experience proved, our apprehensions were not in the least justified, for during the ten months that preceded my capture my burghers lived entirely without salt, and were at the time that I fell into the hands of the British as healthy as could be desired.

Existing as we did solely on mealies and meat, potatoes and other vegetables which we might chance upon were regarded as luxuries indeed. Though it may appear strange it is nevertheless a fact that we were always fortunate enough to obtain adequate supplies of mealies and meat. We ground our mealies in coffee mills if no other mills were available. Mealie pap is cooked in a simple fashion, and occasionally boiling hot pots of it have fallen into the hands of the British. The British soldiers were not much better off than we were, for they were limited to bullybeef and "clinkers," though they frequently supplemented their larder by stores from Boer farms, such as fowls, pigs, &c., and had salt, sugar, and coffee in abundance. Their culinary utensils were not rearly so primitive as circumstances had reduced ours to.

Many Boers did nothing but roam round with their cattle, and I confess that on many occasions they excited my admiration by the "slim" manner in which they evaded capture. Boers of this description were dubbed "bushlancers," because they always sought the thickest bushes for sanctuary. These "bushlancers" were of three kinds: There were some who sought by running away with their cattle to escape commando duty, others who hoped by retaining

their cattle to obtain a large profit on them after the War was over, while others were so attached to their cattle that they would as lief have lost their own lives as have suffered their cattle to be taken. All three classes of "bush-lancers" contrived to supply us with adequate stores of food. Often, however, it was a difficult task to get the supplies out of them. When we asked them to sell us cattle we were frequently met by the reply that we had already taken their best cattle, that the British had taken some, and that the little they had left they could not do without. Of course we were not hindered in our purpose of obtaining food by such a reply, and we had sometimes to resort to force. We frequently gave these "bus-lancers" notice when danger threatened, but in most instances they were the first to discover danger, and gave us information as to the movements of the British.

Everybody knows that it is a sore trial for the Boer to live without coffee but this national beverage disappeared entirely from our menu, and its loss was only partly replaced by the "mealie coffee" which we set about preparing. The process was a very simple one. As soon as we off-saddled a hundred coffee mills were set to work. The mealie was roasted over a fire and afterwards treated in a similar manner to that by which the coffee bean is prepared. This "mealie coffee" made a very palatable drink, especially as we were frequently able to obtain milk to mix with it.

We generally roasted our meat on the coals, as we found that without salt meat was most palatable when treated in this way. This is explained by the fact that the ashes of the fire contain a certain saline quality. We obtained mealies in all sorts of extraordinary ways. Sometimes we harvested it ourselves, but more often we found quantities hidden in caves or kraals. Mealies were also purchased from the natives. Every general did all that was possible to sow

in the district in which he was operating, for the soil is very fruitful. We very seldom lacked mealies, although the British frequently destroyed the crops we had been growing. There can be no doubt that when an Afrikander feels hungry he will find something to eat.

I have already mentioned that sometimes when the British swooped down upon us they carried away our culinary utensils, and a question may arise in the minds of my readers as to how we obtained others to replace them. Well, we were not particular in this connection. We found empty tea cans and empty bully-beef tins, and by manipulating barbed wire we speedily converted these crude materials into serviceable culinary implements. We preferred the tar cans because the beef tins often came to pieces after the solder with which they are fastened had been subjected to the heat of the fire. I remember that one day our parson gave as much as five shillings for an empty tar can.

Several British convoys fell into our hands, but the food we found on them consisted usually of bully-beef and "clinkers," things which only dire necessity drove us Boers to eat. Sometimes to our great chagrin we discovered that all our fighting to capture a convoy was only rewarded by the sight of empty trucks or ones loaded with hay and fodder. If perchance we were fortunate enough to capture a camp or a fort we contented ourselves with removing such coffee and sugar as we could carry away on our pack mules.

The clothing question was very perplexing. Whenever we were able to obtain it we bought canvas and converted it into trousers. Sheep skins we tanned and employed either for the purpose of making clothes or for patching. The hides of cattle and of horses that had died of disease were also tanned and employed for the making of boots. I may point out that no horse was

specially slaughtered for this purpose or for the purpose of food. It was only General Baden-Powell and General White who slaughtered their horses to make sausages. Our best clothing supply, however, came from the British Army. Forgive me for saying so; I do not intend to be sarcastic. When we captured a convoy or a fort we always obtained a supply of clothes. At the beginning of the War we Boers had a strong prejudice against any garment which even faintly resembled khaki, but afterwards we grew indifferent and accepted khaki quite as readily as any other material. We generally compelled our prisoners to exchange clothes with us, and often derived much amusement from the disgusted look of the sensitive Briton as he walked away in the clothes of a ragged Boer. Imagine the spectacle! A dandy English soldier, clean shaven, with a monocle adorning one eye, his head covered with an old war-worn slouch hat of broad brim, and his body with ragged jacket and trousers patched with sheep-skin or yarn.

I may say that none of this systematic plundering occurred in my presence. But such things were certainly done, and, after all, who can blame a ragged burgher for resorting to this means, however much to be deprecated, of clothing himself. Remember that the poor Boers were prepared to pay double the value of a suit of clothes, and were, so to speak, cut off from the world, while the British soldier had simply to go back to camp to obtain a new outfit. "Necessity knows no law."

In concluding this chapter I must mention that the lack of matches was very sensibly felt. And when our stock of matches was exhausted we had to resort to the old fashioned tinder-box and flint and steel. We found this expedient a very poor substitute for the lucifer match, but it was certainly better than nothing at all. Personally I experienced the greatest difficulty in getting fire from a

flint and steel, and to do it generally took me quite twice as long as it took anybody else, and I bruised my hands considerably. This latter, however, is an experience to which every amateur is liable, and I was never much more than an amateur at anything.

CHAPTER LI.

OUR FRIEND THE ENEMY.

IN venturing on a judgment of the British soldier, from a military point of view, I may be told that only the man who has had a military training is competent to express an opinion upon the individual capacity of a soldier, be he Boer or Briton. That may be true, as long as people only go theoretically to work; but after my two and a half years of practical experience, my military friends may be gracious enough to allow me to express my simple opinion concerning this important factor, which is undoubtedly fundamental to the efficiency of any army. At the same time I promise to be as impartial in my judgment of the Boer as of the Briton as a fighter, or, at least, as impartial as can be expected from a fallible Boer.

As an officer in the Boer army I encountered the British soldier in many capacities and in many circumstances. The officer of the regular British troops was always prepared to notify that he had no high opinion of the officers of the irregular troops. At the same time the volunteer officer was equally ready to heartily reciprocate the compliment when it was passed upon him by the regular. To be honest, I must say that I specifically give preference to the regular officer, whom I regard as having more initative, and as being more practical and less artificial than his colleague, the irregular Imperial officer. As regards courage I saw little to choose between them. I certainly can draw no great distinction, since I have never been in a position to fight on the same side as they.

Generally speaking, I consider the British officer a very brave man, though I do think he sometimes is guilty of excess in that respect—that is to say, that he goes impractically to work, and, the young officer especially, is driven by ambition to do desperate and stupid things. To this foolhardiness may be largely attributed the heavy losses in officers suffered by the British Army in the War.

Since I fell into British hands I have found the officers to whom I had been opposed on the battlefield treat me with the utmost magnanimity. After having been in personal contact with a considerable number of officers of various regiments I must plainly say that the British officer is to be encountered in only two species: He is either a gentleman or—the other. The officer of the first species is prepared to be charitable to his antagonists, and generally assumes an attitude of dignity and humanity; whereas the latter possesses all the attributes of the idiot, and is not only detestable in the eyes of his antagonists, but is also despised by his own *entourage*.

There have been unfortunate British officers in this War, and there have been occasions when a disaster to the British has been immediately attributed to the acts or the tactics of the commanding officer. In this connection I will cite the regrettable instance of General Gatacre at Stormberg. I do not think this reverse is to be attributed to stupidity, or indiscretion, or cowardice.

There is a great deal of luck attached to any adventure in the field, and ill-luck had pursued General Gatacre persistently. But undoubtedly where bad luck pursues a commander on more than one occasion it is not only expedient but necessary to dismiss such an officer, because his troops lose confidence in him, and their spirit is undermined. It has occurred in this War that incapable officers with good men and much luck have performed wonders.

The British soldier, or "Tommy," who draws a very poor daily pay, for which he has to perform a tremendous lot of work, is, if not the most capable fighter, the most willing in all circumstances to offer himself as a sacrifice at the altar of duty, or of what he considers his duty, to his country. But if "Tommy" by any accident be asked to deviate from the usual routine in which he has been trained, he is a thoroughly helpless creature. This helplessness, in my opinion, is caused by exaggerated discipline, and by the system under which "Tommy" is not allowed to think for himself or to take care of himself, and this individual helplessness has undoubtedly been one of the shortcomings of the British soldier during the War. As regards the fortitude of the ordinary British soldier, I must repeat what I have already said—that he is a courageous, willing and faithful warrior, and that it is to his fidelity and patriotism that the British Army may attribute its success. I believe this to be a truism which will defy even criticism.

There are, of course, exceptions to the courageous "Tommy." If I were to draw any comparison between the nationalities, I would say that of the soldiers with whom I was brought into contact on the battlefield, the Irishmen and the Scotsmen were better fighting men than the others. In regard to British soldiers generally, I would remark that, if they could add good shooting and ability to judge distances to their courage, then they would be perhaps perfect soldiers, and certainly be doubly dangerous to their foes.

Taken as a whole "Tommy" is a very warm-hearted fellow, though as regards humanity some distinction must be drawn between the regular soldier and the enlisted volunteer, for the latter is less humane than the former. This was too clearly shown by his conduct in the transporting of women and children and in the plundering of

prisoners-of-war. But nevertheless "Tommy," generally speaking, whether regular or irregular, was sympathetic with regard to our wounded, and showed great kindness of heart to a maimed opponent.

I consider that the British infantry bore the brunt of the fighting of this War, especially in its earlier stages. Where the cavalryman failed to break through our lines the infantryman stepped in and paved the way for him. We found we could always better stand an attack from cavalry than from infantry, for this latter, advancing as it did in scattered formation, was much less visible to our marksmen. When advancing to the attack the British foot soldiers were wont to crawl along on their faces, seeking cover whenever that was available; thus advancing, and especially when they were supported by artillery, these men proved very difficult indeed to repulse. In my opinion a cavalryman has no chance against a good marksman when he occupies a good position and is able to await attack. The British cavalry horses are such stupendous creatures that given a good rifle and a keen eye it is difficult for one to miss them. They certainly make most excellent targets. It is my firm opinion that for usefulness the cavalryman cannot be compared to the mounted infantryman. Indeed, my experience during the last 14 months of my active participation in the War taught me that the British mounted infantry was a very hard nut to crack. Of course everything depended upon the quality of the man and the horse. A good rifleman and a horseman, especially if he were able to fire when mounted, was a very formidable foe. As for horses, I may say that I do not wonder that the great unwieldy horses for which the British cavalrymen have such a predilection cannot be compared to the Basuto ponies with which we went to work. The African pony has, in fact proved itself to be the only useful horse during the campaign. The British

cavalryman might have used elephants with almost much advantage as their colossal horses. Further, in my opinion, the cavalrymen might just as well be discontinued as a branch of an army, for there can be no doubt that the infantry, artillery, and mounted infantry will be the only really useful and, indeed, practicable soldiers of the future.

While I was writing the above a book was placed in my hand written by Count Sternberg, with an introduction from the pen of Lieut-Colonel Henderson. I doubt very much whether Colonel Henderson read the manuscript of the Count's book before penning his introduction, for I cannot suppose that he holds such small minded and fantastic ideas regarding South Africa as the Count expresses. In this memorable work some extraordinary tales are told of the galloping and trotting feats of the Basuto ponies. The confession that the Count makes that he did not care upon which side he fought so long as he fought is indeed extraordinary. That he ever fought at all the Boer officers who knew him strongly doubt, and none of them will wonder that the Count's bitterest experience in South Africa was that on one occasion some naughty German ambulance people deprived him of a box of lager-beer. This and other amateurs have already overwhelmed the reading public with so much so-called criticism about this War, that I venture upon delicate ground in offering my opinion. I will confine myself to commenting upon what I saw and I know personally, for I know nothing about the topography of Europe and I am not acquainted either with the composition of the European armies or with their manner of fighting.

CHAPTER LII.

THE FIGHTING BOER AND HIS OFFICER.

THERE is great difference between the relations of a Boer officer to his following and the relation of a European officer to his men, for while in the former case no social distinction between the two exists, in the latter the officers and men are drawn from two distinct branches of society. The Boers in their normal state are independent farmers differing only in wealth. One Boer might be the possessor of perhaps ten farms and be worth a quarter of a million, while another might be but a poor "bywoner" and not worth a hundred pence, yet the two men would occupy the same rank in time of war.

Immediately martial law is promulgated the entire Boer adult male population is amenable for military service. In the ranks of a commando one finds men of every profession, from the advocate and doctor to the blacksmith and plumber. From these ranks the officers are chosen, and a man who one day is but an ordinary soldier might be the next promoted to the rank of field-cornet or commandant, and might possibly in a few days attain the position of a General.

The officer and the men that follow him have in most cases been drawn from the same district, and they know one another personally. If, therefore, a Boer falls in battle, whatever be his rank, his loss is keenly felt by his comrades in arms, for they, having known him of old, lose a personal friend by his death.

The Boer officers can be divided into two classes—the

brave and the cowardly. The brave officer fights whenever he gets the chance, whereas his chicken-hearted brother always waits for orders and makes elaborate plans to escape fighting. It is quite easy in the Boer Army to succeed in the course adopted by the latter class, and it not infrequently occurred that the Boers preferred this class of officer to his more reckless comrade, for they argued—"We like to serve under him because he will keep us out of danger." And just as the officers could be divided so could the men.

In this campaign it was noticeable that during the last stages of the struggle the younger officers replaced the older ones. Many of these latter got tired of the War and surrendered to the British, others were removed from their commands as being too old-fashioned in their methods and incapable of adapting themselves to the altered circumstances. Moreover, we found that the younger officers were more industrious, more mischievous, and more reckless. Of course, when I speak of the young Boer officers I do not intend to convey the idea of children of seventeen to twenty years of age, such as I have sometimes encountered among the junior officers of the British Army.

The life training of the burghers in horsemanship and musketry stood them in good stead. I may say that a Boer even early in life is a good horseman and marksman. He does not shoot without purpose for he can generally estimate at a glance the distance at which he is shooting, and he has been taught economy in the use of ammunition. The burgher knows perfectly well how valuable to him is his horse, and he is thus constrained to use his knowledge in carefully tending it; moreover, considerable affection exists, in many instances, between the master and his beast.

Taken all round the Boer is a brave man, but his attitude on the battlefield is influenced very largely by the character of his officer. And being brave, the Boer is, in the main, sympathetic towards prisoners-of-war, and espe-

cially towards such as are wounded. Possessing bravery and humanity the Boer has besides what the British "Tommy Atkins" lacks, the power of initiative. The death of an officer does not throw the ranks of a Boer commando into chaos, for everybody knows how to proceed. It must not be supposed, however, that the death of an officer does not exercise a certain amount of demoralising influence. What I wish to impress is that the members of a commando can act independently of the officer and can exercise their own judgment.

As regards the fortitude of the Boers, I can best illustrate it by pointing to the fact that it frequently happened that having been repulsed with loss one day we attacked our conqueror with better success the next. We often assumed the aggressive when a favourable opportunity offered itself, and did not always wait to be shot at. Frequently we held out for hours notwithstanding severe punishment.

I think even the bitterest of our enemies will allow that the Boers who remained faithful to their country to the last were animated with noble principles. Were it not that so many of my compatriots lacked that which is so largely characteristic of the British soldier, the quality of patriotism and the intense desire to uphold the traditions of his nationality, I would ask what people in the world would have been able to conquer the Afrikander? I say this with great deliberation, and I do not believe that any impartial compatriot will attempt to deny the truth of the statement.

The question suggests itself how would the English have fared had they been placed in a plight similar to that to which we found ourselves reduced? Supposing that we Boers had taken London and other large towns, and had driven the English people before us and compelled them to hide in the mountains with nothing upon which

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to subsist but mealie pap and meat without salt, with only worn and rent clothes as a covering, their houses burnt, and their women and children placed in Concentration Camps in the hands of the enemy. How would the English have acted under such circumstances? Would they not have surrendered to the conqueror? However that may be, one thing is certain, that the patriotism of a nation is only to be learned when put to such a severe test as this.

In his book, "The Great Boer War," Dr. Conan Doyle has, on the whole, gained the admiration of the Afrikanders by his moderate language. But here and there, where he has been carried away by his English sympathies to use bitter and libellous language with respect to the Boers, that admiration has been changed into contempt. Dr. Conan Doyle attempts to defend the British Army by abusing the Boers. Abuse is not argument. To prove that Van der Merwe is a thief does not exonerate Brown from the crime of theft if he has been stealing.

The author describes the shooting of Lieutenant Neumeyer, for refusing to surrender and for attempting to escape from his captors as murder, and the shooting of kaffir spies it also glibly described as murder; whereas, the incident at Frederickstad, where a number of Boers were shot deat by the British because they continued firing after hoisting the white flag, is justified by him. Of course, the execution of Scheepers is also justified by the author. I object to such things appearing in a book, because they must tend to sow anew the seeds of dissension, hate and bitterness, and these have been planted sufficiently deep without being nurtured by Dr. Conan Doyle. Neither Boer nor Briton can speak impartially on this question, and both would be better employed in attempting to find out the virtues rather than the vices in one another's characters.

MY REMINISCENCES of THE ANGLO-BOER WAR

BY

General BEN J. VILJOEN

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